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Parents by adoption : differing perspectives of couples in the formation and launching stages of the adoptive family life cycle.

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PARENTS BY ADOPTION:
DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES OF COUPLES IN THE FORMATION AND LAUNCHING STAGES OF THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

A Dissertation Presented

by

SUZANNE J. MCGOWAN

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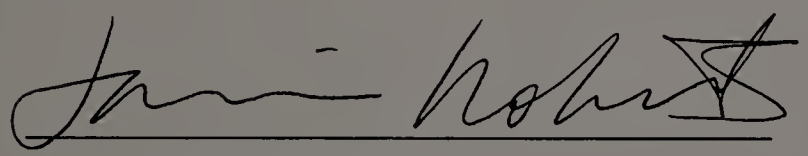

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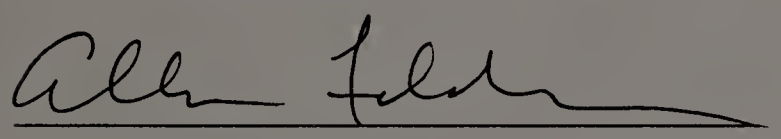

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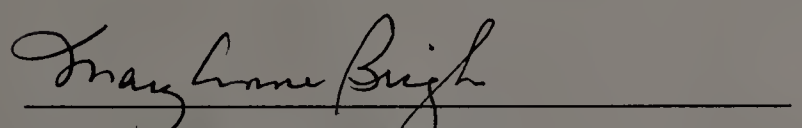

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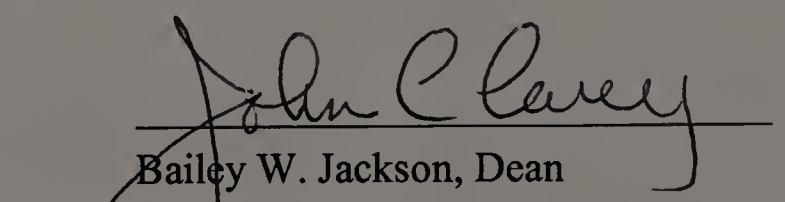

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ABSTRACT

PARENTS BY ADOPTION:

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES OF COUPLES IN THE FORMATION AND LAUNCHING STAGES OF THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

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Sealed adoption records support the notion that adoptive families are the same as biological families and that adoptive parenting should mirror biological parenting. Whether adoptive parents subscribe to these beliefs is not really known, since they have had few opportunities to tell about this way of being a family. The research involved a narrative analysis of the stories told conjointly by six couples in the formation stage and six couples in the launching stage of the adoptive family life cycle; this reflexive research demonstrates the collaborative nature of social constructionism. The research subject (the storyteller) and the research interviewer (the listener) create meaning together through the questions and responses, the interviewer's interpretation of the narrative and then the checkback which allows the storyteller to indicate disagreement or enlarged understanding. Adoptive couples with young children were found to believe that their family is not very different from biological families while the couples with children leaving home were assessing their parenting and the strength of their family ties. Overall, the couples seem to be constrained by their cultural understanding of parenthood.

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CHAPTER 1

ISSUES IN ADOPTION

Introduction

Talk, generally, has been considered to be a clinical tool, the means by which counselor/client interactions are conducted. The study of interview transcriptions, however, has brought talk out of the consulting room and into the arena of research. Qualitative research takes people's talk to be data.

Over the past several years, my interests in adoptive families and in the methods of qualitative research have been developing while my own adoptive family has also grown and changed. I have used participant observation to complete a study focused on a support group for birth parents and adult adoptees involved in searches. Following that, in-depth interviews which detailed the meaning of search and reunion to a birth mother, an adoptive mother and "their daughter" were the foundation of my comprehensive examination. As a result of this work, I have become aware of the demands for adoption reform. For example, the practice of open adoption permits mutually agreed upon levels of contact between a child's adoptive family and the birth family. Unsealing the birth records would give adult adoptees legal access to personal information about themselves that is now denied them.

Context

All adoptees have two families: a birth family and an adoptive family. Adoption practice in the United States, however, is based on sealing court records, which makes a secret of the adoptee's family of origin and the circumstances of her/his relinquishment. Sealed adoption records are often defended on the basis of protecting

the privacy of both the birth mother and the adoptive family. Paradoxically, this practice renders adult adoptees powerless because adult treatment is not accorded them in this extraordinarily personal issue. In the meantime, trends in adoption make secrecy superfluous.

There has been dramatic change in adoption since the 1970's. With the advent of widely available contraception and the legality of abortion, fewer Caucasian infants have been available for placement. This change has led to increasing numbers of international adoptions, special needs adoptions and of open adoptions as well. Children from the countries providing the largest numbers of international adoptees -- South Korea, the Philippines, Columbia, Brazil and India -- look quite different from their White American parents, so pretense about their origins is impossible (Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig, 1992). Aside from dealing with adoption-related prejudice, these multiracial families must also prepare for the possibility of racial prejudice (Shaffer and Lindstrom, 1989). For adoptees with special needs, i.e. physical or psychological handicaps, who are often older at the time of placement because of the difficulties in finding them permanent homes, the original family is likely to be well remembered. In these cases, adopting parents require full, detailed information about the birth family, the pregnancy and delivery and life in the family prior to placement if they are to help their child deal with the past and move ahead (Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig, 1992).

As for open adoption, with the birth and adoptive parents known to one another from the beginning and a level of contact between them, the practice is too new for anyone to tell how openly acknowledging two families "will change the experience of being adopted." Speculation on the positive side, however, is that open adoption will eliminate the unfortunate effects of secrecy because questions can be asked and answered. Adoptees will grow up in an atmosphere of openness and honesty. On the other hand, the adoptee may experience confusion and anxiety as the result of frequent

contact between families. Nonetheless, adoption in the United States today is so affected by international and/or special needs placements as well as by the trend toward open adoption, that reality requires acknowledgement of the birth family: (a) because of contact with them, (b) because of children's memories of them, or (c) because a child's racial heritage proclaims she/he was not born into the present family. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to justify closed adoption, either in terms of continuing to seal records or refusing to unseal them.

If adoptive parents believe that psychological parenting is true parenting, it should be possible to acknowledge that by encouraging change in the legal system. It would prove to adoptees that their parents will not be hurt or alienated if their birth parents are recognized. It would also provide a more flexible adoption system which can be responsive to individuals, allowing "them to choose how much information they want - and the freedom to change their minds at any point along the way" (pp 189-190).

Statement of the Problem and Rationale

The secrecy in closed adoption supports the notion that there is no difference between adoptive families and biological families except for the accident of birth. Many adult adoptees and birth parents who have experienced the process of search and reunion, however, are committed to eliminating the secrets. TRY, a Northampton, Massachusetts organization devoted to helping members of the adoption triad find one another also encourages them to lobby for political change. There are very few adoptive parents involved in TRY and the same is true nationally.

The extent to which adoptive parents actually subscribe to the belief that their families are no different from biological families is not really known. They have not had much opportunity to tell about this way of forming and being a family. Presumably, the experiences of adoptive parents at different stages of the family life

cycle are both the same and different from the experiences of biological parents. The purpose of this research was to gather, from the stories adoptive parents tell, an understanding of the meaning they attribute to being parents by adoption. Parents in recently formed adoptive families may view their experience quite differently from those whose children are closer to leaving home. For example, adoptive parents with young children may find it easy to overlook the fact that adoptees hold membership in two families. A focus on the adoptive parents' experience of their family life was planned in order to shed light on their apparent reluctance to become involved in adoption reform.

Research Questions

1) What distinguishes the experience of adoptive parents in newly formed families from that of adoptive parents whose children are closer to leaving home?

2) Do the stories adoptive parents tell about this way of forming and being a family contain insights about their willingness to support change in adoption practice and/or legislation?

Research Methodology

Social constructionism is a frame for understanding research activities. Rather than being "objective" or "scientific," social constructionism is more a philosophical stance. At the core, it is a belief that researchers cannot neutrally observe and report data, but instead are participating in the creation of that data by virtue of being inside the process. To put it another way, phenomena are only intelligible because language makes them so. My use of language and your understanding of my use of language creates an agreement between us born out of the relational nature of our dialogue.

Narrative analysis is derived from this perspective. The research subject (the storyteller) and the research interviewer (the listener) create meaning and understanding together through the questions and responses, the interviewer's interpretation of the material and then the check-back which allows the storyteller to indicate disagreement or enlarged understanding. This is reflexive research. The meaning which emerges is not "objectively out there," instead it emerges reflexively through the looping process which allows "the expansion of the languages of understanding" (Gergen and Gergen, 1991, p. 79).

A qualitative analysis of the narratives of twelve adoptive couples was planned. Six of the couples have young children, pre-school and/or primary school age (up to 7 or 8); the other six couples have children finishing high school or already working or in college (ages 17-22/23 approximately). A convenience sample of adoptive parents willing to participate was used and conjoint interviews were conducted. The only other criterion was that these be two parent adoptive families, so that variables like divorce and single parent adoption were not introduced. No attempt was made to equalize numbers of special needs, older child, or interracial adoptions. The sample was gathered from families known to the interviewer and referrals from these families. Information was provided by partners regarding their age, ethnicity, length of marriage, education, occupation and extended family adoption history.

The interviews were audio-taped. A series of twelve open-ended questions was used to elicit stories about how the couple became adoptive parents, how they interpreted that experience and their sense of the effect that changes in the adoption laws might have in their family. Direct transcriptions of the couple interviews were reduced to profiles and studied for themes or linkages across stories. For a more complete interpretation, the full texts were analyzed with an eye toward understanding whether the experience of adoptive parenthood had modified and/or expanded the

couple's notions about family formation, especially regarding traditional biological parenthood, the dominant "ideal" in this society.

Significance and Limitations

The significance of this study lies primarily in its focus on adoptive parents. Much has been written about adoptees in connection with their mental health, "genealogical bewilderment," and identity development. More recently, many birth mothers have begun to reveal the secret pain they have endured, letting the world know they were not able to forget the child they relinquished and just "get on" with their lives. In the meantime, adoptive parenting has been open to question since there is "a clear tendency among adoptees not only to seek professional help, but also to need it" (Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig, 1992, p. 10). This piece of qualitative research attempted to find out about adoptive family life from the parents directly and to do that at two different stages of the family life cycle. This was meant to allow differences in the parents' perspectives to come through.

Unfortunately, this is not a longitudinal study. Ideally, following adoptive couple narratives over time would provide a richer understanding of their experience. Changes in adoption practice have to be considered in order to compensate for this limitation; that is, adoptive parents with young children probably have received more adoption education from agencies and social workers than was the case twenty years ago.

Another limitation is the use of a convenience sample. Since this is such a sensitive topic, it was necessary to work with couples who were willing to be interviewed. The self-selecting nature of the sample is only a problem if it is not acknowledged as being non random and non representative. In compensation, however, the depth of the interview (Seidman, 1991, p. 42) allows the researcher to "find

connections among the experiences" of interviewees and "open(s) up for readers the possibility of connecting their own stories to those presented in the study." These connections, says Seidman, are the alternatives to representativeness and generalizability.

The purpose of narrative analysis, it must be remembered, is to investigate the story, " . . . to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events . . . " (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). Aside from the parents' experience of adoption, part of the research interest here is activism, how it develops or does not develop, as the case may be. Random samples are not necessary for discovering something about how people's experience may be linked to public action.

Definition of Terms

Adoption: ". . . generally defined as a legal act that transfers parental rights and responsibilities from the parents who gave birth to the child to those who are adopting the child" (Watson, 1988, p. 26).

Adoption triad: The birth parents, the adoptive parents and the adoptee.

Closed adoption: The practice by which birth parents and adoptive parents are completely unknown to each other because relinquishment is handled through an intermediary professional, the birth certificate is altered to reflect the adoptive parents names and the original records are sealed by the court.

Family life cycle: The transitions in families over a three generation period which mark the entrances and exits of members. These transition points are generally described as courtship, marriage, birth of children, adolescence, leaving of children, readjustment of the couple, growing old and facing death.

Launching: That period in the family life cycle when a young person begins to establish physical, financial and emotional independence with the help of her/his parents who are "letting go".

Narrative analysis: The investigation of the stories told by respondents about their experience. These first person accounts are data which is examined to find out "how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity" (Riessman, 1993, pp. 1-2).

Open adoption: The practice by which birth parents and adoptive parents meet and exchange identifying information before the adoption takes place and agree to some level of contact on the child's behalf afterwards (Baran and Pannor, 1984, p. 246).

Reflexivity: From the social constructionist viewpoint, the notion that research is carried on relationally by virtue of the "expansion of the languages of understanding" in which the "expression of alternative voices and perspectives" produces enlarging loops of comprehension (Gergen and Gergen, 1991, p. 79).

Sealed records: The original birth certificate and record of the legal adoption proceedings which are sealed to make their inspection by the public or by the adoption triad impossible.

Search: The word generally refers to the literal action an adoptee takes to find her/his birth family, usually the birth mother.

Social constructionism: The position that social science research cannot be observer free, but instead that "Accounts of the world (in science and elsewhere) take place within shared systems of intelligibility - usually a spoken or written language" (Gergen and Gergen, 1991, p. 78). It does not focus on internal processes, but on the way people develop meaning together using language.

Organization of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter 2 presents an overview of adoption literature which is relevant to issues dealt with in two of the family life cycle stages, formation and launching. Specifically, these issues involve communication in the adoptive family, disclosure of adoption information and search.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of narrative analysis as a method derived from the social constructionist position of Gergen and Gergen. Evaluation of narratives is discussed and the research process is described in detail, that is the interview process, the transcription of interviews, and the construction of profile narratives.

Chapter 4 sets out the sample. It includes vignettes crafted from the interview transcriptions along with background information about the couples. The parents of younger adoptees are presented first followed by the parents of the older group. Themes are discussed along with the material on developmental tasks facing the families.

Chapter 5 describes the reflexive nature of the research process which links the transcriptions, the narratives and the researcher, as well as any current applicable literature. Implications for future research are also considered.

CHAPTER 2

PERSPECTIVES ON THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY

In this chapter the adoptive family is viewed from several perspectives. Following some historical and legal background to traditional adoption practice, there is a section on open adoption and then some research perspectives on adoptive family relations. Finally, the family life cycle is outlined and the stages of family formation and of launching are looked at in terms of the developmental tasks faced by adoptive parents and their children.

Traditional Closed Adoption

Adoption is a relationship forged between parents and children by law rather than by means of reproduction. In the United States there are statutes in each state describing the conditions and procedures for adoption. Hersov (1990) points out that more children are legally adopted in the United States than in any other country. Generally, the laws governing adoption are understood to allow it only with the biological parents' consent unless the child has been abused or abandoned. The confidential adoption hearing takes place in closed court, after which "the records are sealed by law, with Alabama, Alaska and Kansas the only exceptions" (Hartman, 1993, p. 88).

Massachusetts had the distinction of providing a model for adoption legislation in most other states, the Adoption of Children Act of 1851. It did not contain confidentiality as part of its provisions, nor did any of the state laws later modeled on it. Not until a 1917 law was passed in Minnesota did the sealing of records begin. "And that . . . law was not intended to maintain anonymity between the participants in an adoption, but rather to protect adopted children from the stigma of illegitimacy or 'bad

blood' by removing such information from open court records" (Gonyo and Watson, 1988, p. 14). That means it was not public information.

Sealing of records "to prevent the exploitation of adopted children" had become fairly common by the 1940's and was supported by the social work profession.

> "Social workers believed that adoption should be a private matter and that children would attach to their adoptive parents more firmly if they were completely cut off from their original family. They also felt that adoptive parents could more fully accept children whose ties to their previous family had been totally severed, that the legal process of adoption could in fact sever biological ties, and that birth parents could best be helped by making a clean break with the children they had relinquished " (p. 16).

This was a period in which the "nature vs nurture" debate and the "melting pot theory" prompted belief that superior care-taking in the adoptive family could supersede influences of the child's hereditary family and ancestry (Small, 1987, p. 34). It is easy to see, on this basis, why secrecy began to play such an important role in adoption policy. It protected "belief in the supremacy of nurture over nature."

At the same time, adoption agencies began to claim they could offer greater confidentiality in adoption than could the lawyers, physicians and clergymen who had been most likely to come into contact with unwed mothers. Confidentiality, say Gonyo and Watson (1988, p. 16), "supported the struggle of social workers to establish their professional role in the adoption process."

Today in Massachusetts, all records in adoption cases are sealed and cannot be inspected unless a probate judge orders otherwise. A 1986 statute describes the standards for release of information.

1. The adoptee, at age 18, may receive non-identifying information about the biological parents upon written request.
2. The biological parents may receive non-identifying information about the adoptee upon written request.
3. The adoptive parents may receive non-identifying information about the biological

parents upon written request if the adoptee is under age 18.

4. The identities of adoptees and biological parents can be released to each other by mutual written consent when the adoptee is 21 (adoptive parents may give written consent if the adoptee is under 21).

Non-identifying information generally includes: date and place of adoptee's birth; age and general physical appearance of the biological parents at the time of placement; the race, ethnicity and religion of the biological parents; medical history of the biological parents and of the adoptee; the type of termination, whether voluntary or court ordered; the facts and circumstances relating to the adoptive placement; age and sex of any other children of the biological parents at the time of adoption; educational levels of the birth parents, their occupations, interests, skills, etc. and additional information about the medical or social conditions of the biological family members that may have become available since the adoption was complete. The ease with which non-identifying information can be obtained varies from state to state and may also be quite incomplete when it is obtained. It is interesting to note that as far as some other industrialized nations are concerned, adult adoptees have access to their birth records in England, Scotland, Wales, Israel, Finland and New Zealand. Records remain sealed in Canada and Australia.

Lifton (1988) points out that adoptive parents and adoption agencies are the parties most involved in keeping the records sealed and that birth mothers were never protected by confidentiality in some states. Psychologist and adoptive father William Reynolds has said "that the agencies and the law are really protecting the adoptive parents' need for exclusive possession of the child - the 'our very own baby' syndrome" (Lifton, p. 265). And, in fact, say Gediman and Brown (1989, p. 250) birth mothers only signed waivers of parental rights. They signed no other agreements regarding contact; they "expected confidentiality . . . but it was a verbal promise from the agency, not a written contract."

Perhaps the real question is whether it is or ever was ethical to cut adoptees off from information about themselves. Adoption search organizations beginning with Orphan Voyage in 1953 and including The Adoptees Liberty Movement Association (ALMA), the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) and Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) grew and developed when "search efforts . . . were frustrated by adoption agencies and courts" (Gonyo and Watson, 1988, p. 16). Certainly, it is ethically questionable to deny adoptees access to information about themselves, the same information which accrues to other members of society automatically.

Open Adoption

In traditional closed adoption there is no communication between the biological and adoptive parents; the child's birth certificate is altered so as not to reflect the birth parents' names. Since the 1976 publication of their article "Open Adoption," Baran, Pannor and Sorosky, who introduced the concept, have been in the forefront of those calling for change in adoption practice in this country. Their 1984 definition of open adoption is frequently cited.

> Open adoption is a process in which the birth parents and the adoptive parents meet and exchange identifying information. The birth parents relinquish legal and basic child rearing rights to the adoptive parents. Both sets of parents retain the right to continuing contact and access to knowledge on behalf of the child (p. 246).

In 1988 Demmick and Wapner identified four levels of contact characteristic of open adoptions:

1. Restricted open adoption: The adoptive family shares pictures and information with the biological parents for a limited time after placement, with the agency acting as

liaison between the families.

2. Semiopen adoption: Biological parents meet the adoptive family, but there is no further sharing of information.

3. Fully open adoption: The adoptive family and biological parents meet and share information for a limited time.

4. Continuing open adoption: The biological and adoptive families plan to contact each other over the course of the adopted child's growing up.

With both adoptive and biological parents participating in an open adoption, the degree of contact between families is whatever they find agreeable. Nonetheless, it is the very idea of contact between the two families that raises so many objections.

Since "Adoption is generally defined as a legal act that transfers parental rights and responsibilities from the parents who gave birth to the child to those who are adopting the child" (Watson, 1988, p. 26), there is no way to mandate continuing contact between the adoptive and biological parents once the adoption has been finalized. However, there is also no legal restriction preventing further contact. In other words, the parties to adoption, including adoption agencies, are free to develop whatever policies they choose with regard to their practice of adoption. Courts, however, have tended not to favor open adoption, even though state legislatures are beginning to view disclosure of information to adult adoptees somewhat less prejudicially. "In the few cases that have concerned court-ordered visiting between adopted children and biological parents, courts have usually assumed that visiting would 'confuse the child and result in harm rather than good' " (Berry, 1991, p. 642).

In truth, the newness of open adoption means that "research on divorce and custody is often called on to provide evidence of the effects on children of parental separation and visiting." While such research might be applicable to older-child adoptions, it is not applicable to adoptions of infants (p. 644). By the same token,

research on open adoption is limited primarily to interviews with adoptive parents.

> Most of these studies find that adoptive parents are uneasy about open adoption, but that those who practice it feel more settled over time. Biological parents are generally quite favorable toward openness. The effects of openness on children and the relationship with both sets of parents - the most important consideration in any argument for or against an adoption practice - are best investigated in a longitudinal study, and have not been so studied to date. (p. 645).

Adoption has been an enormously successful institution, providing millions of children and parents with families. There are no signs of its weakening. Despite the decreasing numbers of Caucasian infants available for placement in the United States, "increasing numbers of foreign born children are being adopted" as are older children and children with special needs (Hersov, 1990). The arguments against open adoption are clouded by value judgments, for example, that parenting in adoptive families should mirror biological parenting, yet evaluation of open adoption is difficult because data is lacking. The last fifty years have been devoted to closed adoption. Nonetheless, there are reasons for supporting open adoption. Among them is the fact that both heredity and environment influence human growth and development. Optimal parenting, presumably, is attentive to both and open adoption, which acknowledges an adoptee's membership in two families (with an agreed upon level of contact between them) also promotes the partnership of heredity and environment.

The Family Life Cycle

Let us turn now to the family life cycle. As a tool for conceptualizing family development, it is intergenerational, attentive to the family moving through time and focused on life events through which new members enter the family or which mean the exit of members (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989). Since adoption is a way of adding

members to a family which has life time implications (it is also a way in which birth families lose members), the family life cycle is a valuable frame for looking in on the process at various stages.

The notion of a family life cycle grew out of the "interplay between [individual life] stages," as elucidated by Erik Erickson, and the various challenges to "narrow . . . intrapsychic theories of development." Stress researchers, for example, learned that personal crises often occurred at times when individuals were entering or leaving the family system. Thus, the conception began to grow of a family life cycle as a series of events marked by the addition of family members or by the loss of them. "Generally, courtship, marriage, advent of young children, adolescence, leaving of the children, readjustment of the couple, and growing old and facing death are the major categories" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 95). Although many changes in these patterns have occurred in the past few years, as a paradigm they are still instructive. The stages outlined below are not so much "normal" as they are recognizable and familiar sounding and thus useful as a base. It should also be noted that this is very much a middle class American paradigm (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989).

Stages

1. Leaving home: the single young adult. The young man or woman leaves home seeking physical, financial and emotional independence by separating from the family of origin. This separation is accomplished through development of intimate relationships outside the family and establishment of an occupational identity. Parents must avoid encouraging dependence (through over-helpfulness) while young people need to avoid "remaining dependent or rebelling and breaking away in a pseudo-independent cutoff of their parents and families" (p. 14).

2. The joining of families through marriage: the new couple. Relationships in two families and among friends are realigned to include the new spouse as the couple forms a new system. "Marriage requires that two people renegotiate together a myriad of

issues they previously defined individually, or that were defined by their families of origin, such as when and how to sleep, talk, have sex, fight, work, and relax. The couple must decide about vacations, and how to use space, time, and money. There are also the decisions about which family traditions and rituals to retain and which ones the partners will develop for themselves" (McGoldrick, 1989, pp. 209-210).

3. Families with young children. Accepting children into the family involves adjustment in the couple's relationship with each other in order to handle child rearing and household tasks. It is a period of time with "profoundly different meaning" for men and women, when differences in beliefs and attitudes about "who should or will raise the children" and how work and home life are to be balanced come into bold relief (Bradt, 1989, pp. 236-237). At this same time, the new grandparents must make the transition to less central, less responsible roles in the family.

4. Families with adolescents. This is another period of major renegotiation of relationships. As teenagers struggle "to move out of the system," looking for more freedom and independence, parents must become less protective and more flexible. The emotionality inherent in this shift "often brings to the surface unresolved conflicts between parents and the grandparents, or between the spouses themselves. Developmentally, "the parents are approaching middle age. Their focus is on such major midlife issues as reevaluating the marriage and careers." They may also be facing the increased frailties of their own parents (Preto, 1989, pp. 256-257).

5. Launching children and moving on. The successful separation of a young person from the parents (see stage 1 above) is referred to as launching. Because of the many entrances and exits during this period, it highlights the intergenerational nature of the family life cycle. The parents must come to terms with their marriage; they must deal with the deaths and/or disabilities of the aging grandparents. Their children may be partnering now, so new members enter the family in the form of sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989).

6. Families in later life. Once the last child has been launched, the couple face such issues as future financial insecurity, retirement, illness and dependency, or the death of a spouse. On the other hand, remarriage is a possibility. Grandparenthood offers opportunities for new relationships in the family and a re-visiting of one's own childhood and parenting. Grandparents become "models to the next generations for the phases of life ahead" (p. 20).

Obviously, there is much that this brief outline of stages in the family life cycle does not address. Examples are the changing role of women in this culture, the effects of divorce and remarriage on the family, multiproblem poor families living in a milieu of social and economic deprivation, and, of course, the influences of race, religion and ethnicity on family life. Today, it is also true that birth rates are lower and life expectancy is longer so that child-rearing, which formerly "occupied adults for their entire active life span," now is completed in "less than half the time span of adult life prior to old age" (p. 11). Nonetheless, it is still crucial to think about the individual life cycle as taking place "within the family life cycle, which is the primary context of human development."

In terms of the partnership between heredity and environment mentioned earlier, it is obvious that the family is an environment. If the essential process to be negotiated by the family "is the expansion, contraction, and realignment of the relationship system to support the entry, exit and development of family members in a functional way" (p. 13), it becomes clear that the life cycle in an adoptive family may have some special challenges. Because heredity is not a given, as it is in the biological family, adoptive relationships may experience more provocative tensions as family members enter and exit. Fears of loss and abandonment are likely to come to the fore for adoptees and their parents because the issues of leaving families and entering new families are so psychologically loaded. Probably they have not been openly discussed.

Research Perspectives on the Adoptive Family

One of the troublesome aspects of traditional closed adoption is that it seems to have affected communication in adoptive families. Adoptive parents, perhaps, have not realized the importance of talking about adoption. During the 1960's, two strands of information began to emerge from the literature. One seemed to indicate that adoptees were particularly prone to mental health problems. The other, and these were not mutually exclusive themes, began to describe adoptive family behavior around the issue of adoption.

Any number of studies, including those of Goodman (1963), Schecter (1964) and Simon and Senturia (1966) identified adoptees as having significant behavioral problems such as lying, stealing, academic underachievement, overt aggression, sexual acting out, and also alcoholism and suicide. None of these studies, however, were able to identify adoption per se as being the cause of such difficulties; they tended to be methodologically flawed or based on theoretical formulations and clinical observation. Kirk (1966) pointed out that the term "psychological difficulties" was itself ambiguous, that the treatment settings mentioned were widely various and that clinical caseloads, though informative, "do not permit generalization as to the prevalence in the population" because of their self-selecting nature (pp. 293-296). A 1987 review of research based on non-clinical samples of adopted children (Brodzinsky, Radice, Huffman and Merkler, 1987, p. 351) produced equally inconsistent results. Without "some clear criterion for maladjustment," the authors say, adopted children may score higher on some behavior problem index, i.e. appear more maladjusted, yet still be "within normal range."

Communication about Adoption

The other line of inquiry emerged from the Child Welfare League of America follow-up study of 100 families who had adopted children under the age of three between 1931 and 1940 through the auspices of four social agencies in New York City. The first phase set of results, published as How They Fared In Adoption (Jaffee and Fanshel, 1970), is focused on the adoptive parents. Adoptees had not been interviewed yet. With regard to "telling" about adoption, the authors found, to their surprise, that seven in ten families had withheld "most or all" information about their children's biological families, and that families with a "less protective" child rearing style were more "open" about adoption. Jaffee and Fanshel also say that adoptees who were especially curious about their birth families, desiring more information than their parents had or would give them, tended to have more problematic adjustments to life. "None of the other ostensibly important aspects of 'the telling' -the timing of initial revelation, the nature and amount of material revealed, or the frequency of subsequent allusion to adoption- was appreciably correlated with outcome" (pp.312-313).

At the conclusion of each original interview with the adoptive parents, the couple was asked to permit contact with their adult adoptee. Ultimately, thirty-three adoptees agreed to participate; the follow-up to the parent interview was then conducted two weeks to two months later. It is interesting that the parents of these participant adoptees "had tended to be substantially more candid" about adoption in the family than had parents of the 67 non-participant adoptees (Jaffee, 1974, p. 212).

The results indicated strong agreement between the two generations regarding both the closeness of their relationship and its quality, but consensus did not carry over into their assessments of the adoptees' current adjustment. The adoptees more readily recognized and admitted their liabilities than their parents did. Even more telling was the intergenerational disagreement on how the topic of adoption had been handled in

the family; " . . . about one-fourth of the adopters but only about one-tenth of the adoptees reported that the latter had been given full and truthful information about their biological parents marital status and social-personal traits" (p. 218). Furthermore, half the adoptees reported having pressed for more information while only twenty percent of the parents interviewed agreed. Jaffee's point is that the parent/child relationship is compromised "if the adopted child feels an absence of openness and trust when he (sic) fails to receive the information about his preadoptive past that he (sic) perceives he has requested" (p. 219). The interviews also revealed that 61% of the adoptees felt they had raised the subject of adoption without hesitation over the years, whereas 33% of the parents "asserted that the adoptees never voluntarily raised the subject."

> None of the other data in the study can shed light upon this finding. However, the direction of the intergenerational dissensus suggests that many parents may have defensively failed to perceive or to remember the number of times their children had initiated discussion of their adoptive status. This would be especially true in families where there has been little discussion of the topic due to parental hesitancy to talk about the matter and where, as a result, it would be less threatening for the adopters to recall that their children had rarely or never brought up the subject. Such parents could then conclude that their children had not been deeply interested in the topic and that they, the parents, had therefore been justified in not alluding to the adoptive status over the years (p. 220).

The work which most directly addresses family relations in adoptive families is the comparative longitudinal study of adopted and non-adopted 15-18 year olds from the non-clinical population published by Stein and Hoopes in 1985. Having reviewed various conceptualizations of identity put forth by Blos, Erikson, Offer, Marcia and Mahler, the authors culled "components of the identity concept" that lent themselves to research: family relatedness; peer relations/social competence; sexuality/role identity; school performance; self-image/self-esteem. Although Stein and Hoopes admitted that "research assessing the relationship between identity formation and adjustment has been somewhat limited," they believe there is a positive relationship between them. Thus,

those who are "well-adjusted" are less anxious and less confused about who they are; they are further along in the process of achieving an identity (p. 11).

Findings indicated that of all the variables considered, quality of family relationships was most predictive of positive identity and adjustment across all groups. Perceived openness of family communication about adoption issues was found to enhance identity formation, though it was not quite as predictive of successful outcome as the overall quality of family relationships. Finally, it was determined that family composition, as defined by the presence or absence of non-adopted siblings, had no impact whatsoever on the overall adjustment of adolescent adoptees.

The study was also attentive to search behavior because it has frequently been interpreted as a meaningful indicator of identity. Among these 15-18 year old adolescents, search was not the general rule. "Although searching seemed to have little relationship to either the style of communication about adoption issues or the presence of non-adopted siblings . . ., it was found to be more prevalent among adoptees who perceive themselves to be markedly different in appearance from their adoptive parents" (p. 64). The authors deduce that "excessive genealogical concern" in adolescent adoptees may be a signal, either of "impoverished" relations within the current family or of "mismatch issues;" adoptive parents, however, need to understand that an adolescent's desire for more "information about his/her origins is a normal and healthy manifestation of the process of identity consolidation" (p. 65). By 1990, Hoopes had resolved that it is family relationships, communication about adoption, and parental attitudes about adoption that "enhance or impede identity resolution in adopted adolescents" (p. 162).

What begins to emerge as a result of such studies is the larger picture of adoption as it affects the entire family, not just the adoptee. It impinges on how the family communicates as well as on how family members relate to one another. H. David Kirk, sociologist and adoptive parent, developed his theory of adoptive relations, first published as Shared Fate in 1964, as an outgrowth of the notion that adoptive parents are "role-handicapped because they have had no preparation for the possibilities of non-fecundity and adoption" (p. 31). Physically deprived of biological parenthood, the dominant "ideal," the couple then discovers that adoption, which holds such promise for rectifying their situation, cannot make it fully equivalent. "The cultural cues on the one hand invite people to adopt," says Kirk, while "the legal and administrative impediments" to easy adoption put the adopters into a dependent position as "petitioners for parenthood" (p. 104).

The coping mechanisms then used by adopters, according to Kirk, are of two types: "those which serve the adopters in denying that their situation is different from that of biological parents ('rejection-of-difference') and those which serve the adopters in acknowledging that difference (acknowledgement-of-difference')." Kirk's belief is that the latter posture is conducive to open communication and healthy family relationships while rejection-of-difference promotes more disruption in family life because communication about adoption is limited and non-empathic (pp. 98-99).

Goodness-of-fit theory is a lens for examining family relationships which refers to compatibility between parents and children in terms of personality and style. "Consistent with attachment theory, goodness-of-fit theory states that when infants are raised by parents who understand them and are sensitive to their needs, development will be optimized" (Grotevant, McRoy and Jenkins, 1988, p. 443). In a study of emotionally disturbed adopted adolescents, family interactional patterns around (a)

hyperactivity, (b) avoidance of cuddling and contact in infancy and (c) perceived personality incompatibility led to problematic parent-child relations; feelings that the adopted child did not "belong" in the family were observed to have grown out of such dissatisfactions with the relationship. Parents unable to acknowledge the importance of heredity were less able to communicate successfully about adoption, whereas those who emphasized the importance of heredity "attributed the problems to biology and abdicated any responsibility for their role in creating or ameliorating the problem." The emotional distancing which may result can reinforce a child's feelings of rejection because the parents seem unable to tolerate a temperament or behavior style which does not match their own (pp. 452-453).

Brodzinsky, who has adapted Erikson's model of psychosocial development to the particular tasks faced by adoptive families (1987) suggests that the way adoptive families handle these tasks will vary according to their orientation vis a vis acceptance or rejection-of-difference. His modification of Kirk's original notion is that changes in a family's coping pattern need to occur along with family life-cycle changes. So, for example, rejection-of-difference may be valid while children are young and basic trust in family relations is being built, but it may become more necessary to acknowledge differences as children grow older and begin to explore the meaning of adoption in their lives (p. 42). Brodzinsky thinks of the rejection-of-difference and acknowledgement-of-difference patterns as being called forth in "response to normal family tasks and crises" whereas a third pattern which he calls "insistence-of-difference" is more likely to arise out of "persistent high level stress in the family system." This pattern is "not assumed to emerge until the school-age or adolescent years and adoption, in these cases, is likely to be interpreted as causing the problem(s) although family members may be particularly disengaged (p. 43).

All of the preceding makes a strong case for conceptualizing adoption in terms of family formation rather than as a substitute method for achieving parenthood. The

propensity of adoptive parents to forget information or not notice adoptee inquiries or "insist" on the difference speaks loudly to this need. The fact that records are sealed and information is not available should not mean the subject is closed among family members. Yet, cutting off contact between adoptive families and birth families seems to have resulted in a build-up of tension and anxiety that precludes communication. No one is sure what to say, what is appropriate to say or whether anything should be said at all. For example, Partridge (1991) describes her adoptive mother as, seemingly, quite willing to discuss her daughter's adoption, but it was done without feeling on her part, "nor did she seem interested in any feelings I might have about being adopted." Her father, on the other hand, responded to his daughter's question about her birth name with a fit of coughing alarming enough that she waited another twenty years before mentioning her adoption again in his presence (pp. 201-202). It is easy enough to prescribe more communication, but not at all clear what needs to be communicated. The family life cycle perspective suggests that communication about adoption might facilitate the entrance and/or exit of members to the system.

This particular project is focused on only two of the family life cycle stages, the entrance of children into the family and the launching of young adults. Much of the framework is based on the work of Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig. Their research interests have been in the area of adoption for many years, Brodzinsky and Schechter having devoted their respective careers to it. Particular credit must be given to Brodzinsky who has really brought a developmental perspective to the adoption discussion.

Stage 3: The Newly Formed Adoptive Family

Adoptees enter the family in widely various ways. Instead of a birth after nine months gestation, a fairly firm timetable, the new adoptive parents may bring home a

child after a few weeks or after many years; the child may or may not be an infant or of the same racial /ethnic background, may or may not have been in foster care or formed attachments to previous caregivers. Rituals of entrance may or may not have been observed; e.g., showers for new mothers, child naming ceremonies.

There may or may not be temperamental differences between parents and child. "To the extent that temperament runs in the family, the lack of biological ties may make it more likely for an adopted baby to be quite different from his parents" and "poor fit," which also occurs in birth families, may be harder to cope with in adoptive families because there is no genetic legacy to fall back on, no sense that this is "part of what has been passed on through the generations" (Brodzinsky, Schecter and Henig, 1992, pp. 38-39). Such difficulties may all contribute to adoptive parents' lack of confidence and thus affect their relations with one another and their satisfaction with the integration of the new family member into the family system.

Disclosure of Adoption

During the years of toddlerhood, pre-school and elementary school, the major issue of integration has to do with the adoptee's level of comprehension around the meaning of adoption and the parents' handling of these disclosures. Until recently, discussion about adoption in adoptive families meant "telling." Adoptive parents, having been charged with the responsibility for explaining to their children these facts of their lives, must determine how to handle the task. It is not easy. What to tell? How much to tell? When to tell? Whether to tell at all? And how will the child respond to the telling? Discussion of antisocial behavior in adoptees (Kirschner and Nagel, 1988) indicates that a major difficulty in the adoption story is that of its interpretation.

> It is not hard to imagine some of the powerful questions that must occur to the child, regardless of the simplified version of the story he (sic) may get from his parents. Did the birth parents love their baby,

> or did they relinquish him because they disliked him? How would they feel about him today? Did they really give him up willingly, or was he taken away by force? Were they cruel or immoral people, unfit to be parents? Does that make him the same? Do the adoptive parents disapprove of them? Of him?
>
> What about his parentage - who are his parents, anyway? Does he belong to his adoptive parents, since he is not biologically related to them? Do they accept him as fully as "real" parents would? Would they tolerate his worst aspects? What if he turned out to be like his "real" parents? Could his adoptive parents accept his thinking about (let alone caring about) his first parents, or do they need to have him all to themselves? Then again, could they change their minds and give him away, just like he was given away before? (pp. 308-309).

The sheer number of these questions, there are 15, would probably startle many adoptive parents. More alarming, however, are the kinds of conclusions a child may draw about his/her adoption when the mediating influence of parental communication is unavailable.

One of the major issues in the psychoanalytically oriented adoption literature involves the family romance fantasy. As described by Wieder (1977), "The usual basic form of the latency child's family romance expresses the wish to be an adoptee in order to overcome ubiquitous and inherent disappointments in the relationship with the parents" (p. 185). In essence, the fantasy is that the child has been separated from a family of much greater status and adopted into one of lower rank, but will some day be restored to the prestigious, rightful family. Schwartz (1970) says that the fantasy is likely to be abandoned when the desire for totally accepting and "all permissive" parents is no longer necessary because "the child accepts that he can love and hate the same individual " (p. 185). For adoptees, however, the truth is that there really are two sets of parents, so fantasies may be difficult to resolve. It is quite possible that without answers to their questions, the adoptee's "all-good and all-bad parental images tend to remain split, one attaching itself to each set of parents" (Kirschner and Nagel, p. 309). These split images are likely to be accompanied by feelings of powerlessness and of personal rejection; the child may condemn the birth parents while also identifying with

them or may believe there is a genetic basis for "badness" (p. 310). Partridge says it is easy to assume that "If I am not allowed to know, or know about, my birth parents, they must be bad. By extension, then, so must I be bad . . ." (1991, p. 202).

Nickman (1985) discusses fantasizing in adoptees in slightly different terms, wondering whether "The attribution to them [birth parents] of good or bad qualities may be closer to an attempt at reality testing than it is to true fantasizing."

> Every reference to a fairy godmother in children's stories, every exposure to myths or news items about parents and children taking leave of one another, every arrival of a new sibling, every separation from the parents takes on a special meaning for adopted children. In addition, their contacts with adults outside the family circle are tinged by their sense of having an unknown origin. Schoolteachers, family friends, celebrities (both famous and infamous) are suspected of being the true progenitors; peers close in age are suspected of being lost biological siblings (p. 374).

In other words, adoptees experience a blur between reality and fantasy because of "the impossibility of definitely disconfirming the . . . hypothesis about a biological relationship . . . ." (p. 375). It cannot really be proven that the teacher is not the child's birth mother. Fantasy, thus, can become an internal event with painful associations rather than the "creative, conflict-free" activity it may be for other children (p.374). "The fantasy solution of the biological child's conflicts -adoption- is the fait accompli underlying the adoptee's distress. The adoptee's wish, in contrast to the blood kin child's, is to deny adoption, establish a fantasied blood tie to the adoptive parents, and thereby erase the humiliation adoption implies" (Wieder, 1977, p. 199).

Developmental Perspective on Adoption Disclosure

Central to the adoptee's development of such emotionally loaded fantasies is the issue of "telling;" that is, how the fact of adoption was revealed to the child. The

general wisdom has been to tell early, gradually providing more information so as to make the word adoption a familiar one during the nursery school years. The work of Brodzinsky, however, challenges this view that children's knowledge results "from a slow progressive accretion of facts." Using the clinical procedure of Piaget, two hundred children between the ages of 4 and 13 were interviewed in open ended fashion (Brodzinsky, Singer and Braff, 1984) in five age groups, each with twenty adopted and twenty non-adopted children. The interview focused on the children's understanding of such adoption related matters as the relationships in adoptive families and the motives underlying adoption. The results indicated that pre-school children are unable to understand much about adoption and that most cannot distinguish between birth and adoption until they are six.

Between 8 and 11 years, children's conception of adoption broadens. They begin to appreciate the uniqueness of this family status, including the many complications it entails. One outcome of this general increase in adoption knowledge, however, is that for some children the adoptive family relationship suddenly becomes tenuous. Inspection of the interview protocols suggests that much of the child's fantasy life at this time is centered on the biological parents' potential for reclaiming the child and/or on the possible disruption of the adoptive family life. Toward the end of this period, however, children typically regain their certainty in the permanence of the adoptive family relationship, although their understanding of the basis of this permanence remains somewhat vague. In fact, it is not until early to middle adolescence that children recognize that adoption involves a legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities from biological parents to adoptive parents.

Brodzinsky, Singer and Braff point out that their study, because it included both adopted and non-adopted children with obviously different exposures to adoption information, "supports the position that knowledge of the world, including adoption knowledge, results from a general process of construction and not simply from a

gradual accumulation of facts or bits of information presented by parents and significant others" (p. 877). The logical conclusion, of course, is that pre-schoolers are being told about adoption before they can comprehend its meaning. The risk, as the authors so aptly put it, is that the adoptive parents' "communication with their children about adoption will be mediated by a false sense of security about the child's existing knowledge . . . and lead to a premature termination of the disclosure process . . . ." (p. 877).

Donovan and McIntyre (1990) describe the particular cognitive burdens thrust upon an adoptee who is too young to understand the meaning of adoption. The specific problem is that love and abandonment can become logically bound together in the child's mind. The story many tiny adoptees hear involves a birth mother who is unable to take care of her baby, but because she loves her/him so much she gives him/her away to parents who can be the new mother and father. (This story precludes a birthfather, assuming that if he been on hand the adoption would not have been necessary). Love and caring in this story are equal to abandonment which a child understands quite literally. Thus the adoptee faces logical dilemmas in attempting to make sense of the adoption story.

First, because she surrendered the child for his/her own good, it is impossible for the adoptee to be angry at the birth mother or to be sad. The result is that "The adoptee often directs the anger toward the adoptive parents - and toward the adoptive mother in particular." Second, the blank faces of the unknown, anonymous birth parents almost force the adoptee "into a bizarre position of obligatory 'fantasizing;' " Donovan and McIntyre report that many adoptees are extraordinarily imaginative, 'incessant' daydreamers.

> Again, we must remember that these are not fantasies in the traditional sense of the term; they are operational hypotheses about the structure of reality. This generation of hypotheses about the structure of existence clearly constitutes a dissociogenic force that cannot help but

> have some effect on cognitive development and academic performance. The incessant "day-dreaming" of many adoptees comes to fill the time that should be devoted to enjoyable learning (p. 207).

Thirdly, the adoption story as usually told to young children sets them up to believe "that there must really be something wrong with him or her." After all, the birth mother was good and loving, so the baby must have been bad if she couldn't keep it. This provides insight into the poor self-esteem of many adoptees who otherwise seem to live in healthy families. Fourth and finally, the adoptee can easily come to fear that the birth parents may return, perhaps to steal the child back. Since they wanted to care for him/her but could not, might they not try to reclaim her/him if their situation has changed? This is a frightening possibility for the adoptee, since it implies the loss of his/her "real adoptive parents." By the same token, the adoptee may consciously fear being given up by the adoptive parents should circumstances develop similar to those that impelled the birth parents' original relinquishment (pp. 208-209).

It is interesting to note here that despite Donovan and McIntyre's comment that operational hypotheses are not fantasies in the traditional sense, they certainly seem very similar in content: the good/bad sets of parents, adoptive and birth, and their good/bad children with attendant worries and anxieties. The power these hypotheses exert in the minds of adoptees, however, is a function of their internal-ness, of their being hidden inside the adoptee, unexposed to the light of day, as it were. It seems quite likely that ongoing communication in the family to facilitate the developmental nature of learning and understanding would go a long way toward divesting adoptees "incessant day-dreaming" of its powerful affect.

Tasks for Adoptive Families in the Formation Stage

What should adoptive parents be communicating about? Many things, as it happens: about the adoptee's pain around the experience of being different, of not looking like the family, of not having been born into the family the way other children are born into their families. There is much grief connected with this pain because of the losses entailed. "Typically, adoptees placed early in the first few months of life do not express the shock, deep depression, uncontrollable crying, or intense rage that are commonly part of acute or traumatic loss associated with older child placements" (Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig, p. 72). However, once early-placed children reach the age of logical thought at six or seven and are cognitively able to grasp the notion that being adopted means ". . .that someone had to give them away," ". . . the basis for grieving is in place" (pp. 71-72). Unfortunately, there is "no social recognition of the loss of adoption," yet "Adoption is at once a more pervasive loss - the infant-placed child has had no connection at all with the birth parents - and one that is more difficult to accept as permanent - since the child has a sense that restoring a relationship with the lost parents is at least a possibility" (p. 74). Communication about such sadness is necessary in the family.

In How to Raise an Adopted Child, Schaffer and Lindstrom (1989, pp. 54-55) speak of the tasks adoptive parents face regarding their own development during this period of family formation. Like biological parents they must rearrange their lives to accommodate new chores of childcare and they must find ways to balance the demands of home and the workplace. It is easy for them to be lulled into believing that adoption itself makes no difference. With their infertility no longer in the forefront and the longed for child finally at home, a false sense that the history of their family formation is insignificant may arise. That same history - "which includes infertility, the uncertainty of the adoption process, the intrusion of being observed during a home

study, and the stinging comments of others - can undermine their sense of confidence in their parenting skills" (Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig, 1992, p. 31). Infertility as an issue, say Shaffer and Lindstrom, may need to be reworked because it is quite likely to come up again, for example, during interactions with other young parents who ask about and discuss pregnancies and deliveries and additions to the family. The husband-wife relationship may be strained as a result of infertility with one partner silently blaming the other or fearing the loss of the other's love. Adoptive parents must not only help their child with grief issues but also grieve the loss of the biological child they do not have. Feelings of uncertainty about their "right to exercise full parental authority" can weaken their parenting. Shaffer and Lindstrom indicate that adoptive parents are especially at risk for both physical and emotional over-protectiveness, i.e., to hover, to coddle, to over-react to misbehavior (pp. 58-59). And, when the child starts to school, they may have difficulty with the separation; not only is it "the first intimation of the empty nest," but also it requires letting go and allowing others to be in charge, just at the time of the child's dawning realization of what it means to be adopted (Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig, p.79). Overall then, this is a stage in the adoptive family life cycle when heredity will need to be acknowledged, especially by the parents as they help their child and themselves deal with the meaning of adoption. They are a "real" family, though not a genealogically related family.

Stage 5: Launching Adoptees and Moving On

Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig (1992, pp. 125-127) point out that the age at which one is "grown-up" varies from person to person depending on such factors as social class background and education. Societally, there is also confusion. Driving a car (literally, away from the house!) is permitted at age sixteen or seventeen, voting and entering the armed services is not possible until age eighteen, "and you can't drink

alcohol or draw from your trust fund until you're twenty-one." "Youth," say the authors, is a "new transitional period" that is experienced primarily by middle-class full-time college students, who by virtue of their extended education are not expected to grapple with becoming independent. Presumably, launching occurs later in these families than it does in working class families where the expectation is that an eighteen year old will enter the labor force. This, of course, means that the timetable for launching will vary from family to family depending on its socio-economic status. The type of community, whether rural or urban, and the job market will also have significant bearing on launching. Some protected "youth" will not take on the tasks of young adulthood until the late twenties and early thirties.

The period of launching is also one requiring many changes in self definition. Thinking of oneself as a career person, as a partner or as a parent or as a civic-minded community member is the way adulthood and independence are achieved. The extent to which young people are able to make this separation from their parents is greatly influenced by that family's history of "letting go." Perhaps the eldest or the youngest is the one with the most significant difficulties in leaving the family. Perhaps women have greater difficulty than men because of family expectations around male and female behavior. "Running away from home by joining the armed forces, precipitous marriages, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, drug dependence and alcohol abuse all point to difficulties with separation" (McCullough and Rutenberg, 1989, p. 295) as does the need for extended financial support. Faced with such problems, parents typically "identify [them] as residing in the young adult." Among adoptive parents, concerns about a "bad seed" may arise from fear that the adoptee has inherited these problems. The family may be completely unprepared for trouble, having avoided all conflict in the past by emphasizing an unrealistic degree of harmony. Or they may take another tack, that of rationalizing the problem as "not a problem;" it is not a problem, for example, that the youngest child, several years beyond college graduation, still lives at home and

is unemployed. It is much less usual for such a "failure in emancipation to [alert the parents] to problems in themselves" (p. 296). Implied in the phrase "letting go," however, is the notion that the parents are the ones who must do the launching.

Schaffer and Lindstrom (1989, p. 162) indicate that just as adoptive parents must "possess their child," claiming the child as their own, upon entrance to the family, so as not to see him or her as "the 'other,' an outsider," so must they "relinquish the remnants of the claim [they] worked so hard to establish." Strengthening their marital ties as this period of child-rearing ends is the authors' suggestion: new projects, vacations, dinners out, career renewal, refresher courses, etcetera, all help in the necessary refocusing which sends the message to young people "it's okay for you to leave." In other words, the parents must adjust their relationship to one another as spouses and their relationship to their child as parents so as to permit the adoptee to leave home. That departure will resonate the cords of potential loss for all parties, raising fears that do not come into play in blood relationships. It is the overprotectiveness and the expectations that may have developed, as well as the concerns about whether connection can be maintained in the absence of biological ties that make launching difficult in adoptive families.

Search

It is during this period of launching and moving on that adoptees may begin thinking about a search for the birth family. The freedom involved in leaving home and separating from the adoptive parents raises the real possibility of finding one's identity. Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig (pp. 128-129) describe the search as a "task of integration . . . . The adult adoptee must incorporate his identity as an adoptee into his broader sense of self, so that the notion of being adopted takes its rightful place in his life."

From analysis of data they collected, Bertocci and Schechter (1991) reported that adoptees claimed a consistent increase in awareness of their adoptive status throughout development, with the need to get specific information on birth relatives, i.e. conduct a literal search, not occurring until adulthood. More than half felt that lack of physical similarity to their adoptive family was problematic. "Regardless of how positively or negatively the adoptive family was evaluated, common themes were of feeling lost, disconnected, unwhole and pervasively anxious, with post-search changes clustering consistently around improved self-esteem, body image, interpersonal relationships and lessened vulnerability to anxiety states" (pp. 182-183).

Similarly, the results of a questionnaire survey of 124 adoptees in Ontario, Canada (Sachdev, 1992) showed that frequency of desire to meet the biological parents increased steadily from age ten onward. Searchers were motivated to repair the "discontinuity" in their lives by finding (a) their genetic roots and (b) that they bear physical resemblance to someone related by blood. The next "important motive cited by these adoptees was their desire to share the period of life they had lost by separation and to assure their biological mother that they were well and cared for" (pp. 58-59). Sachdev says that intense identity and genealogical needs impel the search and that "male and female adoptees [searchers] did not differ in their desire to know and their reasons for searching" (p. 59).

Bertocci and Schecter (1991, p. 180) speak of search as falling into a continuum ranging from unconscious-only associations and fantasies, through conscious - level ideation, to activated search aimed at literal reunion . . .." Search behavior is as much "thinking or wondering about" the birth parents at one end of the continuum as it is actual face-to-face meeting at the other end (p. 181). When literal search is undertaken by adoptees, its meaning to them is of interest because of the window it opens onto their experience of adoption. As a psychiatrist, adoptee and search group member, Robert Anderson (1989) describes three views of search which

rather than being professional conceptualizations reflect, instead, the functions of search as the searchers understand it. At the simplest level, says Anderson, search is regarded as an adventure. It is an uncomplicated, but dramatic adventure, as great odds are overcome and the biological family is reunited. The purpose of the search in this view is to be together and share the future.

To some extent, all searches include this adventure component, but some searches are undertaken for other, more complicated reasons. Anderson speaks of the search as having therapeutic intent when it's purpose is to make a change in oneself. Some searchers think of change in themselves in terms of adding something that has been missing. Anderson refers to this as the medical model of change, saying it is the most common one. In this formulation, information and experience are missing. When the adoptees' questions are answered about medical problems or their original names "or whether their biological mother thought of them on their birthday and when the biological connection is made so that the deficits of adoptive status can be put aside," the person is cured. She/he is likely to say, "Now I know who I am," or "Now I feel a lot better about myself" (pp. 626-627). Finding out the truth is like swallowing a pill and the person is healed.

A rather different purpose for search, says Anderson, is undertaken by adoptees desirous of mastering the issue of adoption in their lives. They seem to be working out of a psychological model of change. Adoption happened to them. Having been traumatized by "transplantation" from one family to another without opportunity to influence the situation at the time, the adoptee takes the active steps of search and reunion which allow him/her to accept and deal with the trauma. Trauma by transplantation is hardly the conventional view of adoption, but Anderson is persuasive when he says:

> Vietnam veterans are not sent to posttraumatic treatment centers to be told they should forget about the war, be glad their name is not on the Vietnam Memorial, and to think about fly tying or their bowling

> average. Likewise, there are not many rape counseling centers where the women are told to forget about the experience, pretend it did not happen, or redefine it as a one-night stand. Yet adoptees are often encouraged to ignore adoption as a factor in their lives.

He concludes by saying that these three views "of search are not mutually exclusive" and that "adoptees typically embrace all of them to some degree, although usually one view is dominant" (pp. 630-631).

It should be mentioned here that "every adoptee carries on an intrapsychic search, involving fantasies and curiosity about his birth parents and the reasons for his relinquishment. But relatively few adoptees take that intrapsychic search to the next level, to an activated search either for more specific information or for a reunion with the birth family" (Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig, 1992, p. 140). Although some adoptees undertake a search during adolescence, most who search do so during young adulthood. The "average" searcher is 29 years old and "up to eighty percent of searchers are female. Searchers tend to be married, with stable positions in middle-income jobs. Their interest in searching usually has been triggered by a significant life event: marriage, the birth of a child, the death of one or both adoptive parents." In other words, a literal search has some relationship to the entrances and exits of family members which were noted earlier as being family life cycle markers. Perhaps a new legal contract (marriage) allows the adoptee enough freedom and/or confidence to step beyond the boundaries of the old contract (adoption) into search. Perhaps the birth of a child stimulated empathy with the birth family or finally having a "blood tie" reduces fear that the adoptive tie can be lost. The death of life with the adoptive parents may signal the birth of life with biological relatives. The entrances and exits which provide the impetus for search, however, metaphorically refer both to the adoptive family and the biological family.

A search also helps the adoptee "come to grips with at least six universal themes in human development (p. 142).

Loss and mourning: Losses accumulate in every life, with new losses breathing life into all the old ones. Adoptees who search may do so from a desire to resolve the first loss, that of the birth parents, one which might actually be repaired.

Envy. A lifetime of feeling different from others and the desire to be the same may prompt adoptees to undertake a search so as to obtain the biological tie that others have.

Sexual identity. Bertocci and Schechter (1991) point out the hazardousness of sexuality for adoptees. It raises twin problems of fertility and infertility depending on which set of parents the adoptee identifies with and is also closely associated with loss and rejection and thus may hinder the ability to form intimate attachments.

Consolidation of identity. Adoptees need to feel real, to end the sense of "duality," of having a false self and a real self (Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig, p.145). Starting a literal search gives the adoptee a sense of control over her/his life and "represents a dramatic shift in the adoptee's self-perception." She/he can be an active agent of change (Bertocci and Schechter, 1991). Identity development is enhanced.

Cognitive dissonance. The search can resolve conflicts inherent in the adoptee's situation that become intolerable. Dissonance, for the adoptee, includes having a birth certificate with the adoptive parents' names on it while knowing that one was born to others; it also includes knowing that the birth mother relinquished him/her because she loved her baby, although this is a highly unusual way of expressing love; ordinarily, people who love stay close to each other. Another dissonance involves knowing that some people regard adoption as a fortunate outcome for the child while others regard it as second best to living with "real" parents (Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig, 1992).

Body image: Bertocci and Schechter (1991) say that the adoptee's body is "his or her only link with the birthparents, which intensifies the meanings which he or she ascribes to physiological texture, coloring, and body type" (p. 187). "Coincidental

resemblance" to members of the adoptive family which is often "fastened on avidly by casual observers" may, in fact, increase feelings of isolation in the adoptee and is another aspect of search.

For some adoptees, it seems clear, search for the birth parents will be very important for establishing themselves as full-fledged adults. Howard (1990, p. 246) sums it up by saying that the social and psychological identity theories all lead to the prediction that "adoptees have some additional hurdles to surmount in the process of identity formation, obstacles which are not present for non-adoptees." First of all, there is the lack of knowledge of the past which is required "for a sense of continuity of self." Second, there is "the stigma of being different," that is, being a person whose mysterious origins are shrouded in secrecy. "For those from whom information is withheld, the secret is a badge of inferiority. When the secret is about who one is, its dehumanizing effect reaches maximum force" (p. 245). Third is the issue of gender. Given that "men and women play different roles in society," as adoptees they may experience the "identity dilemma" quite differently too. "The tendency of even very young males toward independence and separation in contrast to the female's proclivity for intimacy suggests that there may well be a difference" (p. 249). If "separating from" is the base of male identity formation, Gediman and Brown (1989) suggest this may make it "easier" for males "to integrate their adoptive status into their developing sense of identity" (p. 56). This may also be the reason, or one of the reasons, that males are less likely to be searchers than females. Other reasons might be a different relationship to key transitions like birth of a child or marriage.

The challenge for adoptive parents regarding search is to view it as, perhaps, necessary to the process of letting go. Letting go is not the same as loss, nor is it abandonment. Instead, it can be understood as freeing because it allows the family to experience fully the real psychological ties which bind them. They can truly appreciate

themselves as an adoptive family, not entirely different from a biological family, not entirely the same: the same and different.

Summary

"Adoption is a social construction" (Hartman, 1993, p. 87) which in this society has meant assuming that it can be substituted for biological parenthood. Unfortunately, the implications of substitution are that the "real thing" is better. Constructing adoption as an alternative means of family formation would go a long way toward eliminating the bias toward biological families.

It is clear that adoptive families must acknowledge the history of their formation. Parents are called upon to communicate with their children about birth families and relinquishment, bearing in mind that both heredity and environment are important to human development. In addition, the family life cycle concept facilitates an understanding of adoption as a process across the life span.

All families go through cycles of change which are related to the entrances and exits of members over three generations. Adoption, however, places some special demands on the family as the sequence unfolds. For example, adding a new member to the family by adoption, requires couples to handle parenting tasks beyond those of biological parents. In this stage of family formation, they must also deal with the many stresses which surround disclosure of adoption information to their child. Pretending that adoption is "just like having our own baby" sabotages communication about the grief and joy inherent in adoption. By the same token, launching a young adult requires that parents let go and that family members learn to relate to one another as adults. A search for birth parents and/or the potential for such new relationships are additional assignments for adoptive family members who must try to reconcile their love and caring with fears of losing each other.

Given all the above, it seems obvious that members of the adoption triad are likely to have changing responses, thoughts, attitudes and feelings about adoption at different times across the life span and in the family life cycle. For a researcher, trying to put all those variations and permutations into writing is awkward, probably because stage development is closer to providing snapshots of moments in time than it is to being a moving picture. Thinking in terms of narrative, however, provides a wholeness of meaning which includes such complexities as evolving understanding and the flow of history. Neither is it choppy, esthetically. At the same time, narrative is such a basic concept, one so easily understood that it bridges the gap between theory and actual data collection quite elegantly. It allows the voices of adoptive parents to be heard more clearly.

CHAPTER 3

A REFLEXIVE METHODOLOGY

The method used for this study, narrative analysis, was selected because of its relationship to social constructionism. These two reflexive notions, emphasizing researchers and subjects as participating together in a social process, i.e. the construction of meaning, are well defined by psychologists Kenneth and Mary Gergen, leaders in the field of qualitative research. Following an introduction to narrative and to social constructionism, this chapter takes up self narratives, the evaluation of narratives and then the interpretation of interview narratives. Maintaining this narrow focus eliminates some of the confusion that a broader sweep across the literature on narrative would engender. The first person "I" is used when I refer to my own research plans and decisions.

Narrative and Social Constructionism

> The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole. At the level of a single life, the autobiographical narrative shows life as unified and whole. In stories about other lives and histories of social groups, narrative shows the interconnectedness and significance of seemingly random activities. And in the imaginative creation of stories about fictitious characters, either passed on as part of a cultural heritage or as contemporary artistic creations, narrative displays the extensive variety of ways in which life might be drawn together into a unified adventure (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 36).

As alluded to in the quotation above, the narrative lens has been used widely in such disciplines as literary criticism, history and psychology. This interest has evolved because (a) the use of language to organize episodes into relatedness, or (b) the nature of cause and explanation, or (c) the desire to understand life development and personal

identity can all be studied and understood from the narrative perspective. In the behavioral sciences specifically, although there has long been a clinical interest in life histories and case studies, research has been conducted using the quantitative methods of scientific inquiry. Recently, however, there has been a groundswell of interest in methods of understanding life development and personal identity in terms that do not require the testing of hypotheses by using numbers.

In Actual Minds, Possible Worlds, Jerome Brunner (1986) discussed two separate ways of understanding or "modes of knowing:" first, the knowing that may result from logical arguments which have accompanying formal and empirical proofs and second, the knowing that grows out of "good stories, gripping drama, believable . . . historical accounts." Whereas the logical argument is concerned with truth attained through reason, and/or mathematics and science, the story deals with experience, intention, behavior and consequences: "what those involved in the action know, think, or feel, or do not know, think, or feel" (pp. 11-14). In terms of narrative, people use their stories to tell about themselves and to explain their lives (Polkinghorne, 1988). Stories are the vehicles by which they make meaning of life's events.

The word narrative itself refers both to a story and to the telling of a story. Choosing and using language is central to narrative. Stories are told with words which have been selected by the story teller, while at the same time, others hear the story and interpret its meaning. The language, the users of the language, and the hearers of the language are closely linked. This is the base line of social constructionism. As discussed by Gergen and Gergen (1991), social constructionism is a view which posits that the ". . . conventions of language and other social processes (negotiation, persuasion, power, etc.) influence the accounts rendered of the 'objective' world. The emphasis is thus not on the individual mind but on the meanings generated by people as they collectively generate descriptions and explanations in language" (p. 78). The key word here is collectively. The social constructionist position, as opposed to

constructivism, does not focus on internal processes, personal subjectivity and self reflection, but rather is relational, focusing "outward - into the fuller realm of shared languages. . . . The aim is to realize more fully the linguistic implications of preferred positions and to invite the expression of alternative voices or prospectives into one's activities" (pp. 78-79). Language and its meaning, in other words the story, is mediated by the relationship between teller and listener.

Social constructionism is relevant to the research at hand because the meaning adoptive couples ascribe to their experience of parenthood is affected by the interview process. Their stories were molded around my questions which may have taken their narratives off in directions previously unexplored. At the same time, I heard stories which offered various interpretations of adoptive parenting and thus opened new directions for me to explore. The relational nature of this situation is clear and suggests that narrative methodology is particularly appropriate for this research. It also provided a framework for exploring issues in adoption that interested me like search and reunion, open adoption and change over time. As an adoptive parent myself, I was fascinated by the possibility of gaining some perspective on my own experience, a checkback on myself, as it were.

The Vocabulary of Self Narrative

Kenneth and Mary Gergen (1988) think of narrative and the self as related because of the ways stories are both told and lived. The term self-narrative, which they coined, refers to "the individual's account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time," events which are thus understood to be "systematically related" (Gergen and Gergen, 1983, p. 255). The basic rules for narrative accounting, as synthesized by the Gergens (1988), are the following:

a. There is a point to the story, something to be explained.

b. The "events" related in the story are relevant to that point.

c. The events are placed in the story in an ordered way.

d. The events are "causally linked" to the point of the story.

e. There are signals which indicate the beginning and the ending of the story.

Aside from these "rules" which are employed in the structuring or telling of stories, the Gergens also describe the story's events "as moving through two dimensional evaluative space." Stability narratives, for example, are those in which the story teller "remains essentially unchanged" over time. Progressive and regressive narratives, on the other hand, link events together incrementally or decrementally; in other words there is either an uphill or a downhill direction. Things get better or things get worse. Dramatic action in the story results from sudden variations in the direction. For example, a progressive narrative with an unexpected rapid regression is the story we refer to as a tragedy. The romance and/or the comedy are regressive narratives that have changeovers to the progressive line. Suspense and danger are also agents of drama because they provoke anticipation that the line of direction will change.

From the perspective of research, the point is not so much to determine what type of narrative a person is using as it is to understand the social value of the narrative. What is being communicated in a story? The Gergens indicate, for example, that in stability narratives people can present themselves as dependable and reliable, characteristics which are valued both in society and in relationships. The progressive narrative suggests that positive change, improvement, is possible, whereas the regressive narrative of on-going deterioration can also allow for compensation or attempts to reverse the decline. To a great extent, however, the meaning of these narratives is dependent on another's acquiescence. So you may present yourself as steady and reliable, but I must agree with you if this representation is to make sense. "Because one's narrative constructions can be maintained only so long as others play their proper

supporting role, and in turn because one is required by others to play supporting roles in their constructions, the moment any participant chooses to renege, he or she threatens the array of interdependent constructions" (p. 39). So when lovers tire of one another and "break up," the narrative they had been constructing together is completely altered because "the parties in the relationship pull out their supporting roles" (p. 40). My story about myself as a "good mother," for example, requires the agreement of my children; if they tell a different story, they risk my changing my story, which will then affect their own (Gergen and Gergen, 1983, p. 270).

In other words, our stories are not told in a vacuum nor can they stand on their own merit, as it were. Instead they exist in a social context and are dependent for their meaning life on the support /agreement of others. They are also told in the context of the larger society. Culturally, some stories are supported, some are not. So, for example, adoption is generally supported in the context of infertility, but it is not understood if a couple decides to adopt without evidence of infertility. Nor does social work practice usually support such an action.

Thus, the present research with adoptive parents involved conjoint interviews. The parents told their story together, something they may or may not have done previously. The way they construct the story of adoptive parenthood and present themselves and each other forms the heart of their narrative. It also provides insights about their outlook on adoption and its meaning to them as a way of forming a family and/or of achieving parenthood.

Evaluation of Narratives

Are all narratives equally valid, none better or worse than another? Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992, p. 9) argue that narratives are related to identity formation. Because culture places constraints on us as narrators, telling our stories is not a value-free

exercise. Gender differences, racial oppression, social class issues, to name a few of these constraints, have effects on what people say and how they say it. Cultural values do shift and change, forcing accompanying notions of right and wrong or good and evil also to change. These forces may influence individual development too. In other words, "The damage done to narrative self-understanding by oppressive social conditions," can be offset. Some narrators will tell stories that describe personal transformation; these may not be stories of "unfettered emancipation but rather the continual struggle of liberative insight against cultural and intrapsychic resistance" (pp. 12-14). Presumably, such narratives are not the stability narratives mentioned by Gergen and Gergen, but rather those tragedies or comedies or romances which involve change in the direction of the story line. They may be stories "constrained by oppressive cultural conditions" or stories "liberated by critical insight and engagement" (Rosenwald, 1992, p. 265).

What is it that prompts critical insight ? Although our understanding of ourselves is culturally embedded, Rosenwald believes that narrators distinguish between themselves and their stories, (I am not my story), and are not indifferent to their own stories either. Instead, each new telling of a story "refers to the preceding accounts implicitly or explicitly," and "New living action follows a new story partly as a way of catching the life up to the account of the life and partly to express what is missing from the story" (p. 274). To put it another way, Rosenwald says, life is always more complex than any tale and each tale is altered at various times by life events, new perspectives and behaviors which prompt revisions. We revise our stories in response to life developments which bring about revisions in ourselves. Some of these developments may have the salutary effect of provoking that "liberative insight" mentioned above.

Then, as narrators become more aware of themselves, able to stand back and observe "self" more readily, they may awaken to the cultural constraints that "narrow their vision." Some narrators will come to awareness by virtue of dialogue with a

listener and occasionally that listener is the research interviewer. "Dialogue may enforce steadier standards of rationality . . . and may confront the narrator with the listener's skepticism" (p. 281). The perceived relationship between narrator and interviewer may be one of kinship or one of power, either of which can provoke insight. Human development, in other words, "does not occur in abstraction from social processes" (p. 281). That liberating insight which is found in some narratives results from both "telling" the story and "living" the story while also experiencing the learning which dissatisfaction with the narrative and/or its context engender. Rosenwald concludes that "better" stories are identifiable because they are comprehensive.

> They contain more detail of every kind. Narrative generalizations are supported with instances. Instances are set in historical context, showing how the past reverberates in the present and how the present retrospectively illuminates the past's potential. History is seen as interactive - made as well as suffered. One's relation to the world and relationships with others and oneself are recognized as being ambivalent and contradictory. The future is seen as an unfulfilled and unpredictable possibility, but not without limit (p. 284).

To summarize, then, Rosenwald argues that some stories are indeed better than others and can be identified as such. Stories are not all equally valid. It should also be noted that the researcher analyzing the story is the person likely to be determining whether it is "liberated by critical insight." Since that is the case, the researcher must be aware of her/his own point of view and account for it in the analysis.

A consideration here is the contrast between narrative evaluation and traditional reliability measures (Riessman, 1993). Factual truth cannot possibly be derived from people's stories. Narratives have viewpoints and narrators will restructure their stories at various times depending on their values and interests, the audience and the agenda. The notion that a narrative should be consistent over time presumes that "the truth," or telling the truth or finding it out is the basis of knowledge (p. 64). In working with

narratives, however "trustworthiness" is the key to validation, not truth. Trustworthiness, says Riessman, can be approached in four possible ways.

a. persuasiveness: The data, that is the transcribed narrative(s), are interpreted in the light of the alternative explanations which have also been documented so that skeptics can find clear acknowledgment of their particular issues.

b. correspondence: The narrators have reviewed the transcribed interviews and interpretations of their participation in the study and are in agreement with the investigator - or their disagreement has been documented.

c. coherence: refers to the "overall goals" (global coherence) of the narrator, the narrative strategies revealed by the text itself (local coherence) and the "recurrent themes that unify the text " (themal coherence).

d. pragmatic use: The extent to which future researchers can make use of the data to argue "for the validity of a narrative analysis" (p. 68).

For purposes of this research, a small number of adoptive couples (12) had an opportunity to tell about this way of forming and being a family. The researcher who posed the questions, listened, analyzed and evaluated also contributed to the meaning. The research was planned so adoptive parents would have the opportunity to review the interview profiles and comment on them.

As these couples heard themselves tell their stories and participated in the narrative process by evaluating the profile narratives and the researcher's interpretations, the impetus toward development, toward the "liberative insight" mentioned by Rosenwald (1992) may be activated . " . . . it is the difference between subjectivity and its obsolescent narrative manifestations that moves life forward in search for new more satisfying identities: the life story is always false; it contains both more and less than the subject's potential" (p. 286).

The Interpretation of Interview Narratives

The process of doing narrative analysis requires planning. For this research, the plan was based on the suggestions of Seidman (1991), Riessman (1993) and Mishler (1986). "Interviews are conversations in which both participants - teller and listener/questioner - develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both" (Riessman, 1993, p. 55). Almost any interview will include stories if the interviewer can turn control of the conversation over to the subject. Seidman (1991) also notes the importance of keeping the interviewer's agenda from controlling the conversation and suggests that leading questions should be avoided as should questions to which the interviewer already anticipates the answer. " . . . we understand and become aware of our own research activities as telling ourselves a story about ourselves, ... But we must remind ourselves that we tell our stories through others" (Steier, 1991, p.3).

The Interview

I am an adoptive parent and can be understood to be constructing my own story in the reflexive process of listening to and interpreting the stories of other adoptive parents; even posing the questions shapes the process. To begin with, I encouraged the couples to tell their stories through an interview process that facilitated it, that is, 12 open-ended questions including follow-ups (Appendix A) and less, rather than more structure in the interview. The first question sets the stage by asking the couple to tell the story of how they became adoptive parents. The remaining questions, then, are meant to evoke detail in the narrative: family history of adoption, the adoptee's homecoming and the responses of other people. The couples were encouraged to speculate on the future, reflect on the past and wonder how they are viewed by friends

and family. Their opinions on legal issues in adoption were sought for two reasons; (a) to ascertain how informed the couples were and (b) to gauge whether the couples wondered whether adoption per se affected their family life. Finally, the couples were asked to comment on the meaning of the interview to them personally and specifically on their willingness to be involved in adoption reform. Although none of the questions suggested comparisons with biological families, they were leading questions in the sense that they treated adoption as central. New perspectives were invited; for example, socializing with other adoptive parents may never have been considered; alternatives to closed adoption or changes in the law could be novel ideas.

For this study I initiated seventeen contacts in order to obtain the necessary twelve participant couples. Of the seventeen, I had some acquaintance with seven. I made sixty-seven telephone calls and mailed thirty handwritten letters. Scheduling an interview usually took anywhere from two to six weeks; the average time was about one month. First there was a phone conversation in which I introduced myself and the project and requested the couple's participation. This was followed by a letter (Appendix B) confirming the phone call, reiterating details and, for purposes of clear communication, enclosing the Personal Data and Voluntary Consent Forms (Appendices C and D). Then a second phone call established the couple's willingness to meet with me and the appointment was made or not. Often, additional calls were necessary to confirm or re-schedule appointments, get directions and so on.

Five couples were contacted who did not participate. Since the research required equal numbers of couples in the two stages of family development, I lost a great deal of time whenever a couple chose not to be involved. Only one of those five couples turned out to be an inappropriate subject. The woman had adopted as a single parent and though she and her partner considered him to be the adoptive father, they were unmarried and he was not legally the father. The other four couples, interestingly enough, were all parents of young adults most of whom had been adopted in infancy.

Their given reasons for non-participation ranged from "our family is too easily identifiable" so our "privacy could be compromised," to "we're too busy and it just isn't convenient," to "it doesn't seem very important to us and besides everything is fine," to "our adopted children won't consent to our being interviewed." The result: it was much more difficult to involve couples with older children in the research.

The twelve couples who participated were all Caucasian and ranged in age from late thirties to mid-fifties. Religiously, four couples were Roman Catholic, two Protestant, one Jewish and five mixed and/or non-practicing. Among the partners there were three doctoral degrees and nine masters degrees; six were high school graduates and the remainder had some college or a bachelors degree. Four partners had been married previously and three of them had had biological children. Two of the adopting couples had biological children also. After they adopted, two couples learned there were birth mothers in their immediate family. Two other couples knew of relative adoptions several generations back. Only three couples had no instance of adoption of any kind in their family. Four couples adopted internationally, four couples adopted an older child and three couples adopted transracially.

Transcriptions and Profile Narratives

My meetings with the couples generally took two hours with approximately an hour and a half of that time on audiotape. Afterwards, a back-up tape was recorded. Each audio interview was transcribed in complete detail first. All identifying comments and place names were removed and the pseudonyms the couple had chosen for themselves and their children were inserted. The full length transcriptions run anywhere from 45 to 90 pages. Because of their length, only one of them has been included for reading (Appendix E).

My decision to transcribe the entire audio-tape verbatim rather than doing "rough transcription" followed by re-transcription of sections that seem "to take a narrative form" (Riessman, 1993, p. 56), was to avoid losing original material and/or shaping the analysis inadvertently. As a method, the value of narrative analysis (Mishler, 1986) lies in the fact that it "preserves the complex ordering of actions and reactions that constitute social reality"(pp. 240-241). To put it another way, narrative analysis preserves the connectedness of responses. "The story contains the sequence of socially meaningful acts without which it would not be a story . . . ."(p. 241). Therefore, when analyzing the story, the meaning of the verbal connections can enter the interpretation. This is quite different from coding responses in which case the responses are lifted out of their contexts.

The profile narratives (Appendix F) are shortened versions of the transcriptions. I constructed them by marking all the passages of interest and eliminating all the awkward phrases and repetitions from the originals. I also erased my own voice. The order of the spoken words was not altered, although some topics were dropped if they seemed to be unimportant to the overall flow. I had to believe in my own judgment (Seidman, 1991). Approximately 350 hours of work were necessary to bring the audiotaped interviews to the finished profile narrative form of 12-20 pages each.

Seidman makes a nice point which illustrates the reflexive nature of the process when he says, "The story is both the participants' and the interviewer's. It is in the participant's words, but it is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said" (p. 92). Importantly, the profile is "in the words of the participant," that is "in the first person, the voice of the participant." The passages deemed "of interest" and marked by the interviewer are brought together "in the order in which [they] came in the interview." These profiles of participant couples can be grouped, and at the same time, particular passages within and among them clustered thematically (p. 91). Themes arise from the interview material and present themselves to the researcher.

The collaborative nature of this research lies in the fact that the couple was telling their story in partnership while responding to statements that I selected and later analyzed. The reader, in a sense, is also a participant, able to "see how the interpretations were derived" while imagining other possibilities too. This is the essence of qualitative approaches, that meaning-making is a process of construction. Each couples' feedback about the interview was sought. Having received a copy of their profile, they had an opportunity to elaborate and/or articulate areas of agreement and disagreement and then to comment on seeing their story in writing. This process allowed them full participation and gave me a checkpoint for reactions to the process. The couples did not see the other profiles or read the discussion; time became essential to completing the research; they had an opportunity to read the discussion and comment after the analysis was completed. (See Chapter 5). One of the participants, however, was quite curious about how others had responded and wondered if her own comments would have been different under other circumstances.

Once the profile narratives were completed, a second letter (Appendix G) was mailed out explaining how the audiotape had been handled and reminding the couple about the checkback, at which time they would review the profile. I phoned then to plan the second meeting. The checkbacks were much less complicated to arrange; perhaps because the letter indicated I would be calling, the couples were better prepared. I also knew more about everyone's availability and mentioned in the letter that this would take only about half an hour. In fact, the checkback often ran closer to an hour. Some couples read together, others passed the pages. No one expressed any dissatisfaction with reading their speech style, although I did prepare them by mentioning that it would not be like reading prose, because we speak so differently.

The couples were not especially comfortable with the checkback initially. It introduced awkwardness at our second meeting that usually lifted once they had finished reading. Mostly, the reading time was very quiet. All of the couples were pleased with

their profiles and felt that they were accurate representations of the interview. Afterwards, they often gave me a brief update on the adoptee. The couples also seemed comfortable with their level of disclosure, but none went beyond it, not even to explain why they had chosen the pseudonyms they did. Most of them, however, had forgotten what the research was about and wanted to be reminded about that.

My sense was that reading the profile narrative assured the couples that their identities had, indeed, been protected. I also asked what they thought the theme of their profile was and then used that as a title for it. These titles and the names of the couples are listed below. I gave each couple a small thank-you gift in appreciation for all their help and these were received with obvious surprise and pleasure.

<u>Couples Who Are Forming a Family</u>

Charlie and Marie	A Positive Way to Form a Family
Frank and Stephanie	Raising Adopted Children is Different from Raising Biological Children
Fred and Stella	Optimism
Bill and Rose	A Real Family
Michael and Elaine	The Difficulties of the Adoption Process
Ken and Margaret	A Simple Twist of Fate

<u>Couples Who Are Launching</u>

Marie and Atherton	A Needy Child Dominates Parenting
Josephine and Fred	A Happy Family
Gail and George	We Are the Family We've Become
Jo and Jean Pierre	Accepting our Children's Health Issues

Millie and Stan	She Still Needs Us
Tami and Bill	The Ups and Downs of Adoption

The reason I have listed the couples here is to begin the process of name recognition. Generally, they are discussed in pairs. I consistently used the male name first for couples with young adoptees and the female name first with launching couples (See above). More detailed information about these adoptive families follows in Chapter 4. Research decisions involving the content of the transcriptions are also addressed.

CHAPTER 4

PARENTS BY ADOPTION

This chapter begins with some explanations about the interviews, the transcriptions and the profile narratives. Various couples are mentioned by name to illustrate points about the research. Then the couples and their children are introduced, six families in the formation stage of development and six in the launching stage. Following brief individual overviews of the families in each group, there is discussion of the threads of meaning found in their stories. Particular attention is paid to the developmental tasks for each stage.

Research Decisions

Interviewing is a complex process. In this instance, it meant meeting people, talking with them about intimate matters and tape recording those conversations. This is not an everyday event for most people and these couples were only more or less comfortable with it. Generally speaking, I felt that the couples with younger children were slightly more comfortable. Perhaps it was because they had spent so much time and energy planning for and waiting for adoption. The fact that I knew some of the couples may have made a difference, although it seemed more likely that our acquaintance contributed to their willingness to participate, not to their comfort with the process.

Often, the interviews seemed weighty in the sense that the couples were choosing their words or considering how much to disclose themselves. The partners were also hearing each other discuss subjects they might never have talked about at length. In fact, Fred says that no one ever asked him and Josephine about adoption before. Fred and Stella wished people would ask questions about it. Both Charlie and

Atherton were reminded of details they had forgotten. And in one instance Frank indicated he was curious about what Stephanie would say.

One complete transcription and the profile narrative that goes with it can be found in Appendices E and F. I selected this couple, Charlie and Marie, because their interview was relatively straightforward. The partners speak clearly and there is no topic jumping, so the reader can track the conversation easily. I had no acquaintance with them either and think it unlikely that I could have influenced their story. The Appendices allow the reader to see the process of reducing a transcription to a profile narrative and also to see how much is lost, especially emotional reactions and the dynamics between the couple and between me and them. In the case of Charlie and Marie, for example, she talks more and he often defers to her on details. Much the same is true for Michael and Elaine and Josephine and Fred. In several instances Margaret and Millie reminded Ken and Stan of the time, suggesting they stop talking so much, there were other plans for the day. Stan and Jean Pierre were very dominant voices in their transcriptions, though it is not so noticeable in the profile narratives.

I was aware that I tended to equalize the partner's voices, insofar as possible, when I developed the profile narratives. In other words, if one partner spoke less, I tried to make sure that voice was well included and that the dominant voice got reduced "air time." Doing this helped me to "hear" the two partners more clearly. So, for example, the Millie and Stan transcript is very long and he talks a lot. After the reduction, I was amazed at how much Millie actually contributed. There was a cost to Stan's voice, because he was telling another story, that of his own upbringing. He spoke at length about his parents and sisters and the kind of family life he had experienced. At the same time, he was interested in my adoptive family and kept asking about my children. Much of that is lost in the profile narrative because I eliminated it. Similarly, Jean Pierre was quite involved in telling the story of Eduardo including the harrowing trip to El Salvador to pick him up. Since I was more focused

on Ana because she is in the launching stage, a lot of the information about twelve-year-old Eduardo was dropped.

My defense for this research decision is that I did not try to make sure the partners had equal talk time during the interview, nor did I elicit responses from each of them to my questions. That felt too awkward: "What do you think Charlie? Do you agree Marie?" I hoped they would respond more to each other and wanted it to flow more naturally. I was interested in who talked about what. Often, it was the men who were likely to take up the legal questions. And again, this is the kind of material that I tended to drop from many of the profiles if it did not seem relevant to the rest of their story about adoption. So Atherton handles almost all of the discussion about sealed adoption records, although his wife does the talking about open adoption saying, "Today, I think I could deal with it. I'm not sure that I would have been in a place, twenty some years ago, you know . . . " It is Charlie who immediately responds to the unsealed records question; "I think it's very controversial. I think I would have a hard time with that process. That's one of the advantages with foreign adoption." Following up, Marie says that she and Charlie are too private to deal with open adoption.

In the case of Bill and Rose, however, she is the one to do practically all the commenting on unsealed records and open adoption. Bill focuses on the agency/social work practices that made their experience so unpleasant. He and Rose, along with Michael and Elaine, expressed the greatest dissatisfaction with agency adoption procedures. Tami and Bill and Millie and Stan, who adopted older children through the Department of Social Services, are not at all critical of their agency experiences. Among the couples, the consensus seemed to be that a good social worker makes all the difference.

I always thought that these adoptive parents were willing to speak with me because I was one of them. Two couples that I knew fairly well were very careful not

to say anything on tape that could identify them, despite my having prior knowledge of these details. I have not disclosed that information. Some of the other couples asked to hear my voice during the interview and there were times when I felt that it was appropriate for me to be heard. They invariably asked about my children wanting to know how old they were when they came home, or how I had handled one thing or another. The "expression of alternative voices or perspectives" produces enlarging loops of comprehension (Gergen and Gergen, 1991, p. 79).

When I could relate to something they said, I frequently disclosed similar experiences. So when Marie and Atherton tried to start a family and "nothing happened," I said, "Right, isn't that amazing how that works. I've been down that road myself." At the end of the Charlie and Marie interview, I talked about the adoption process as I experienced it. In several cases I explained open adoption, pointing out that it could be arranged in a number of ways depending on the parties involved. I talked a bit about adoptee losses and grieving with Bill and Rose. When Roann's mother mentioned that both of them, under separate circumstances, had had opportunities to see her birth mother's name and had refused to look, I shared some information about the timing of young women's searches; it would have been unfortunate for Marie to assume that Roann will never be interested in searching because she had pushed it away until then.

Most of these couples were not socializing with other adoptive parents, so I also tended to give them comparative information. When Fred and Stella expressed disappointment that Olga was refusing to speak Russian although they knew rudiments of the language, I related the story of Ana, another older adoptee, who stopped speaking Spanish just as quickly despite Jo's fluency in Spanish. Charlie and Marie sounded quite certain that everything they had been told about orphanages in India was true. I gave them some information I had heard from Fred and Stella about orphanages in Russia. I have no idea whether or not this information was unsettling for them. I do know that

given the nature of adoption (secrecy, name changes, birth certificate alterations, agency policies and personnel), it does not make a whole lot of sense for Charlie and Marie to believe unquestioningly that it will be impossible for Michael and Tina ever to locate their biological families or that there is no abuse and neglect in India. The recent spate of news stories about adoptions and conditions in Chinese orphanages is enough to make me wary of such assumptions.

None of these examples of my voice are in the profile narratives. There is another loss as well. The nonverbals are gone, all the long pauses, deep sighs, laughter and tears. Marie and I both wept when she told about getting a picture and letter from India describing how sick Michael was. There was also a very poignant moment when Atherton said their experience with adoption had been bittersweet. I commented on the beauty of the word bittersweet and then, after a pause, we all laughed because Marie said, "It's like an oxymoron." "Jumbo shrimp is an oxymoron." Margaret's eyes were full of tears when she said, "I get all choked up about it because I really think it was . . . a miracle that someone actually gave us a kid."

What are the profiles then? If so much is lost, are they of any value? The profiles are constructed narratives, in a way. Each one is a story I wrote, created from the spoken words of the interview, a process in which I participated. In a sense, I wrote the narratives with the couples' help, or they wrote them with mine! The narratives are not objective and certainly don't provide any understanding of what adoptive relationships mean to a particular couple. They don't tell us anything about the couple's relationship with the adoptee either.

The purpose of the conjoint interviews was to learn something about how these couples construct the story of adoptive parenthood and present themselves and each other. (The fact that there are two Maries, two Freds, two Michaels, and two Bills, as well as a Jo and a Josephine doesn't clarify a thing! Having asked the couples to choose names for themselves, I was not comfortable telling anyone that the name had

already been used. "Sorry, we already have a Fred"). The reason I reduced the transcriptions was to try to grasp the center of each story. It is that core which I believe comes through in the profile narrative. It also should be remembered that when the couples reviewed their narratives, they were not in disagreement with my "construction." In large measure, this is probably because they had said exactly what is written. By highlighting those words in a profile narrative, meaning was attributed to them. The reason for only one narrative in the appendix is that they are just too long, 200 pages approximately, for the body of this work. Instead, I used a short vignette to give readers an overview. Now the couples can be introduced.

Adoptive Couples in the Formation Stage of Family Development

These six couples are all Caucasian and between them have adopted eight children, four boys and four girls. One family adopted two children from India and another two from Korea. The remaining four adoptees are White. One of the girls was adopted from Russia at age five and she is the only one to have joined a biological child at home. The other seven adoptees came home as babies, the youngest a few weeks after birth, the oldest at fifteen months. Three families adopted internationally and of the three domestic adoptions two were designated, meaning the birth parents chose the adoptive parents. Only one of the placements was made through a public agency.

Here are the couples. Their narrative profiles are presented in vignettes for purposes of identification. All names are pseudonyms. The couples are: Charlie and Marie and adoptees Michael (6) and Tina (22 mos.) from India; Frank and Stephanie and adoptees Lee (8) and Kim (4) from Korea; Fred and Stella and adoptee Olga (5) from Russia; Bill and Rose and adoptee Liam (6) from the U.S.; Michael and Elaine and adoptee James (4) from the U.S.; Ken and Margaret and adoptee Anne (4) from the U.S. The theme of each couple's narrative has been used as the title.

A Positive Way to Form a Family: Charlie and Marie, Adoptees Michael and Tina, ages 6 and 22 months

Charlie and Marie have a traditional family in the sense that he is the breadwinner and she is currently at home full-time with the children. They are a Caucasian couple in their mid-forties, of Roman Catholic background and both well educated with advanced degrees. Their two children, Michael and Tina, came home from India at the ages of 15 months and 5 months respectively. Charlie and Marie chose an international adoption because the domestic route was lengthy and uncertain; "they were involving things like advertising in other states and taking a chance of birth mothers changing their minds or . . . things like birth mothers who didn't get health insurance and exposing ourselves to having to pay some kind of astronomical health bill." Marie says, "It seemed very . . . sorta precarious in the way it worked, whereas overseas adoptions it seemed like if you did all the paperwork and you had the right fee eventually you would get a child."

Michael arrived very sick having had a collapsed lung and been exposed to TB. He also suffered from malnutrition, which Charlie explains "meant he had been getting enough food but wasn't growing as fast as he should." His developmental delays were dealt with through extensive physical and occupational therapy; for a nine month period he also had to wear a brace on his feet at night. Marie says that after three years of pre-school "now he is going into kindergarten. And, you know, he's gotten such great help from so many people he's ready and he can do just about everything that any other six year old can."

Tina is a different child altogether. She was "really feisty and loud and cute and seeming to be very strong and sure of herself from the very beginning." She also had some developmental delays and has had "therapy for fine motor skills as well as gross motor skills." It has been an adjustment for Charlie and Marie to deal with Tina who is

"so boisterous and demanding and loud" after four years with Michael who was "so cuddly and sweet" as a baby and who continues to be "extremely attached" to his parents.

Charlie says that he doesn't have any concerns about Michael and Tina that would be different "from concerns about having kids in general." Marie is "hoping that it seems like a pretty normal thing to have a Mother who looks different from you." She and Charlie have a lot of friends and neighbors who have adopted and/or married interracially and think that their community is "a really good place to raise internationally adopted children." Michael has begun to be very attentive to his skin and hair color and Charlie indicates, "I thought that it was important that we had at least one other child in the same situation . . . that he would have someone in the family who was very similar to him in terms of adoption, skin color . . . . that was a reason to have two."

Charlie and Marie are clearly delighted to be parents and enjoy their Indian children. They know that because the children don't look like them the family may attract some attention, but living in a diverse neighborhood with family friends whose children are also adoptees of different backgrounds provides them with some assurance that Michael and Tina will be comfortable with their status. They hope that knowledge about Indian culture, i.e. games, music, language, geography can be a "substitute for not being able to find their biological families." Marie says that shame regarding out of wedlock pregnancies prompts Indian women to give false name and addresses when they relinquish an infant to an orphanage. She wonders if it might perhaps be a relief to adoptees to know that they are unable to find out about their birth parents. "Even though," she adds, "it's kind of a sad thing that you won't ever be able to make that connection." Nonetheless, Charlie and Marie are relieved that they won't have to cope with the appearance of birth mothers and that their children "don't have to make the choice," meaning to search or not to search. Their perspective is that adoption is great.

"It's given us the opportunity to become parents." And they agree that "on a day-to-day basis" its "exactly" the same as having biological children.

Raising Adopted Children is Different from Raising Biological Children; Frank and Stephanie, Adoptees Lee and Kim, ages 8 and 4

Frank and Stephanie are close to fifty, Caucasian and college educated. In fact, both have graduate degrees. Frank works in post secondary education and Stephanie is a helping professional. They are of Jewish background. Lee and Kim were adopted internationally and came home from Korea as babies at three months and four-and-a-half months respectively.

Frank and Stephanie are very clear that infertility was not an issue for them. Stephanie says that as a twelve-year-old she concluded that "it makes sense to adopt because there are children that don't have parents." Stephanie is a thoughtful woman, trained to question assumptions, so she checked with RESOLVE to question her own lack of concern about infertility. A self-described worrier, she wondered why she wasn't miserable because she and Frank were unable to "birth a child." She was told that it's different for some people. Frank says, "Neither of us had a very strong feeling about . . . the need to have our genes passed on." They both indicate their annoyance at the social work assumption that infertile couples are necessarily deeply pained.

Frank and Stephanie checked on various agencies and found that domestic adoptions involved very long waiting periods and lists. Waiting up to three years for a Caucasian child made no sense to them since they "didn't feel the need to have a Caucasian baby." They were also unwilling to work through the Department of Social Services, saying only, "We were nervous about that." Korean adoption links with the United Stated were well established so that seemed like "a good way to go."

Frank and Stephanie are very clear about the differences between them. Frank says he comes from "a long line of deniers," that he is not likely to be thinking about problems and worrying about the future. He enjoys the present with lovable, cuddly four-year-old Kim and says that Lee is more likely to bring her troubles and questions to her Mother. Stephanie, on the other hand, has great concerns about what it will be like for her children to be Asian in a White society and fears the kind of racial discrimination they will face. Both parents work very hard to educate their children about Korean culture and they attend Korean-American conferences. Lee is the only Asian child in her school and Stephanie says, "She is very proud of her heritage right now and she does little assemblies at school . . . but the adoption thing she doesn't talk about, she talks about the Korean but the adoption is a different category . . . ." Kim is young and doesn't understand anything about adoption yet. Stephanie says she wouldn't be surprised if he thought he was "birthed on the plane by the plane or something like that," since he sees the video of his homecoming every year. Frank doesn't think Kim even "has a concept of pregnancy yet."

To begin with, Frank and Stephanie found that being adoptive parents meant attending to universals like "feeding and diapering and toilet training." Race wasn't an issue and adoption wasn't an issue. Stephanie, however, is pretty sure they are going to be and is already concerned about teenage dating. She says, "when you adopt internationally, you really can't avoid the fact of being an adoptive family, everybody knows it." Frank likes the present where we don't "have to do much about those issues " yet.

Optimism: Fred and Stella, Adoptee Olga, age 5

Fred and Stella are a Caucasian couple in their mid-forties. They are both college graduates. Stella is an educator with an advanced degree while Fred is in the

technological sciences. They have a biological daughter, Jane, who was born when Stella was 38. Several years and a number of miscarriages later, they adopted Olga who came home from Russia at the age of five. Stella has a cousin who also had a biological child and then adopted an older child and she has a foster brother who has been part of the family since he was 17.

When I met them, Olga had only been with Fred, Stella and Jane for nine weeks. Adoption was very new for them and they were optimistic. Fred, originally, had been uninterested in adoption because of the expense and because "I wasn't sure what the benefits were," "I think I just felt like, well, it wouldn't be mine." Then he got very involved in the process and eventually made the trip to Ekaterinberg to meet Olga. Fred says, "I think it was the greatest thing." "I'm already thinking, gee, maybe we could do one more." And Stella adds, "Now he's like . . . he would start an agency, I think" and "He really has come a hundred and eighty degrees."

They decided to adopt an older child so Jane would have a playmate and also to avoid the disruptions to their full-time work schedules that infant care would bring. Because Stella had worked in the social service sector at one point, she felt strongly that domestic adoption was out of the question. "Here every case is different, every foster home different and a lot of kids get bounced around a lot in foster homes, so you never know what has been happening to them." "Whereas in Russia, if they're taken . . . from their parents, or whatever circumstances, they go into the orphanage and they stay there. Until they are adopted . . . . Even though the orphanages don't have enough food usually, enough medical care, enough money, they do seem to have a fair amount of affection, people who care for the kids. And that was important. Because I thought kids recover from malnutrition, but they don't recover very well from . . . you know, lack of anyone caring for them." Fred and Stella also wanted a Caucasian sibling for their biological daughter and felt that it would be easier for a White child to grow up in their community. These are the reasons they chose Russia for an international

adoption. Olga had been removed from her birth parents' home because of their alcoholism.

Olga began losing her Russian language very quickly after arriving in the United States. The first month she had nightmares and was "pretty . . . hyperactive, but then began to sleep through the night peacefully, stopped having tantrums and was "not going on time out very much." She and Jane get along well and Olga is enjoying some babyish behaviors like having her Mother dress her and eating with a baby spoon. Fred and Stella suspect she never had much parental attention before. Olga has also spoken a bit about her biological family saying "that they were drunk all the time and she didn't like that." She worries if she sees Fred and Stella have a beer sometimes, but says that she likes these parents better. To them, Olga is "this wonderful, outgoing kid who, you can't say that she's psychologically healthy, but she looks as though she's going to turn out to be. Who knows. You never know. But nothing's really . . . wrong yet and it looks like things are on track. And we're thinking this is really pretty neat."

A Real Family: Bill and Rose, Adoptee Liam, age 6

Rose is in her mid-forties, Caucasian, of Jewish parentage. Her husband Bill is five years older and Irish. Rose has a graduate degree and works as a health care professional while Bill holds two baccalaureate degrees. Having changed careers in mid-life, he now works in a technological field. Bill has a cousin who adopted two Korean children and Rose has a cousin who recently adopted as a single parent.

Their story is about the pain of having to jump through hoops in order to form an adoptive family. Previous to starting the process, they had tried in vitro fertilization and over that same period Bill's mother was diagnosed with a terminal illness and then died. Also, Rose and Bill were both finishing school. They had assumed an international adoption would be necessary because of the difference in their ages and

religions. Their dealings with the first agency and social worker were "terribly traumatic;" they had a failed home study and were recommended for a year of marital therapy. Speaking of that social worker Rose says, "And basically the thing that she could pick up on but wasn't able to zero in on is that we really weren't comfortable with a cross-racial adoption." Instead of suggesting that they might need to look at a different program, the social worker wrote a letter detailing their problems and why they would not be suitable parents. This was quite a blow. Bill and Rose had been married for ten years and had recently been through a very tumultuous period. "We sounded like we were a mess, but we just wanted something nice to happen, like have a kid!" "We were totally stressed, but that doesn't mean you can't be a parent."

Once they connected with a second social worker in a different agency things went more smoothly. She helped them identify that mixed race adoption would not work for them. Bill says, "What we really felt comfortable with was our own child for . . . however long it lasts, I hope forever, that looks kind of like us in some ways." They were designated or selected by Liam's birth parents on the basis of their album, submitted by the agency/social worker to an adoption attorney in another state.

They brought home a two-week-old Caucasian infant who had been born to a homeless couple and since then have not had to think about adoption much. Bill acknowledges that their choice of a White child has been influential saying, "if we had a brown child or . . . yellow or different skin child, it probably would have been different." And Rose says, "I get the adoption stuff in the mail and think, "oh gee, should we go to the Open Door Society meetings and its like, why? I mean the local potlucks and have him meet other adoptive kids. He doesn't care. I don't need to care, right now. Maybe some day it will be important to him . . ."

Bill and Rose feel as if the "very rocky road" on which family life started has now been smoothed out. Liam is six, he is beginning to understand about adoption, he does not require their undivided attention any longer. He can play by himself or do things

with them. They can regain some of their life as a couple. Now, says Rose, "it is just being a family. Which is also a rocky road, but no different than anybody else's. And it's wonderful."

The Difficulties of the Adoption Process: Michael and Elaine, Adoptee James, age 4

Michael and Elaine are a Caucasian couple of Roman Catholic background in their late thirties. Michael is self-employed in the skilled trades while Elaine is a college educated health care professional. They have had numerous pregnancy losses including a still birth not long ago. James' adoption was designated, meaning that his birth parents chose Michael and Elaine to be the adoptive parents.

Elaine sent many letters out to people she knew who might come in contact with pregnant young women interested in relinquishing a baby for adoption. Through a priest, a Caucasian teenage couple was identified. Then, Elaine and Michael referred the couple to their agency. Michael says, "The birth mother has flexibility; instead of just surrendering to an adoption agency and not knowing where it's going, she's designating us as the parents." Elaine clarifies that it is a more controlled process than just putting your name on a list and waiting for your turn to come up, but the birth parents still "can say yes or no and you can say yes or no too."

James was born three months prematurely so he was a very tiny, very fragile infant. He came home from a neonatal intensive care unit when he was "three and a half months old, but it was two weeks past his due date! And he weighed seven pounds four ounces by then." Their first year with James was one of guarding his health, but on the whole he has progressed well with the help of occupational and physical therapy, a special pre-school program and so on. Now, says Elaine, "his delay is so minimal you wouldn't notice it really. I think we notice it as parents, but intellectually he's doing great. He's ahead of himself."

Michael and Elaine are now trying to adopt a second child. They would prefer another Caucasian infant, feeling that James has fit in so well with them and their extended families that a bi-racial child would be difficult. Perhaps because they are still very involved in adoption procedures and because they are actively searching for birth parents who would relinquish to them, Elaine and Michael have some very strong angry feelings. They believe that agency fees are outrageously high and that prospective adopters are taken advantage of financially. Michael says, "You feel like you can't be up front and honest with them because you . . . have to be the person they want you to be." And Elaine adds, "You're really their customer and you're buying a service from them in a way. You know, I'm not saying you're buying a baby, but you're buying a service from them. You choose the agency, they're all different and their fees are all different, but then once you get in there you're locked in. And you can't . . . it's not like you're going and buying a car and you can complain . . . . You're in a vulnerable position. And then by the time you get a baby, you're probably so happy you'll forget about it."

Michael and Elaine are both emphatic that there is no reason for adoption to be so expensive and that couples who would make wonderful parents are kept out of adoption by the prohibitive costs. Elaine thinks there ought to be scholarships of some kind to provide assistance. She says a basic fee can be ten to twelve thousand dollars, and for what? Adoption should be "more uniform and nationally the same way instead of every state [and agency] having their different . . . regulations." They are also troubled by all the negative publicity about adoption on talk shows where adoptees claim "their birth parents are haunting them" or about birth mothers that "surrendered their babies and really feel tricked" into it. Elaine thinks that sometime she's going to go to one of these adoption conferences and do her "own workshop and tell people . . . what to look out for."

A Simple Twist of Fate: Ken and Margaret, Adoptee Anne, age 4

Ken and Margaret are a Caucasian couple ages 55 and 45 respectively. He is a high school graduate and self-employed, she has an advanced degree and is employed in the field of criminal justice. This is a second marriage for both and Ken has an adult biological son. Margaret was unable to conceive so forming a family through adoption was a priority for her at the time she married Ken. In this connection they got involved in foster parenting as a route to adoption and a less expensive alternative than private agencies. There was no history of adoption in either of their families.

The adoption story Ken and Margaret tell is entwined with that of two foster children. They had hoped this brother and sister would be freed for placement with them, but after six months concluded that the policy of trying to reunify biological families was counterproductive to their interests. It was then, after deciding to end their foster parent relationship with the two siblings, that they were notified of the availability of an infant. The baby was born into a family which refused to take her home from the hospital.

The outcome is that Ken and Margaret tend to talk about families formed in the adoptee's infancy as being more like biological families than those formed when adoptees are older. They had experience with older children and know, intimately, the kinds of problems they bring with them. Anne's only problem is that she may have to have open heart surgery in the future if her heart murmur, which is asymptomatic at this time, turns out to be an atrial septal defect, "a fairly common type of congenital heart disease."

Ken, especially, refuses to dwell on adoption. When Margaret says how wonderful it was that someone gave them their child, Ken points out that "it's a done deal," now "its the Mama Bear, the Papa Bear and the Baby Bear," and "We never give

it any thought." Adoption doesn't matter to Ken; what does matter is that they are a family and he doesn't believe it would be any different if the family had been formed biologically. Margaret thinks it will become a factor once adoption starts to become a topic of conversation, but now she finds Anne too young to understand and fears confusing her by introducing it too early. At the same time, she says that if they had adopted the foster children, who had been sexually and emotionally abused, they would have needed a lot of outside support and help from other adoptive parents. "I think omigod weren't we lucky we didn't [adopt them,] but [then] I would much more feel the need for [adoption support] than just having a baby and . . . bringing it up." And that's what Ken and Margaret are doing by "a twist of fate."

With the preceding information about the couples for background, they will now be considered in terms of the decisions they made about becoming adoptive parents, their thoughts about being an adoptive family and their handling of developmental tasks at this stage of the family life cycle. Links to the adoption literature will also be highlighted.

Deciding to Become Parents By Adoption

These six couples were in the formation stage of family development. Five of them adopted through private agencies. The sixth, Ken and Margaret who initially expected to adopt two foster children, was the only couple to be working with a publically supported agency. They did that, Margaret said, because "we were older and we wouldn't have qualified for many private agencies." Ken says, "It had a lot to do with no money . . . . We're talking about ten to twenty thousand dollars." Charlie and Marie and Michael and Elaine mention the same kind of cost for their private adoptions.

The other couples had various reasons for using private agencies. Charlie and Marie, who adopted from India, felt that domestic adoption was potentially more expensive than international adoption which required only doing the paperwork and paying the fee. Since Marie mentioned "things like advertising in the other states and taking a chance of birth mothers changing their minds" or potentially "astronomical health bills" if a birth mother had no insurance, this couple must have wanted babies. Marie heard "very good things . . . about this program in India " and actually met another adoptive mother who was very positive about her own experience with the same program.

Michael and Elaine did exactly what Charlie and Marie were afraid of. Although they did not advertise per se, they did send out letters to teachers, nurses, counselors and priests in their acquaintance hoping to locate a pregnant couple willing to designate them as parents. They were successful. And, when James was born three months prematurely, they did have to contend with the kind of financial concerns that worried Marie. They never mention considering a non-private adoption.

It is notable that Marie and Elaine speak of their infertility quite openly. Elaine had been unable to carry a pregnancy to term; Marie talks about abdominal scarring, surgery and in vitro fertilization. These two women also describe themselves as the lead partner in the adoption process, the one who did all the legwork. The same is true of Stella. After Jane's birth and any number of miscarriages, she began persuading Fred to adopt. He couldn't see the point of it at first. Charlie says that he followed Marie's lead and they adopted because she wanted to.

Bill and Rose also wanted a baby and they also tried in vitro, but otherwise they did not discuss specifics. Bill mentions "different medical approaches" and Rose indicates that the "details" of the "medical stuff" aren't even important. Like Michael and Elaine, theirs was a designated adoption. Although Ken and Margaret also adopted an infant, they were not specifically seeking to do that. It was a "simple twist of fate."

They had married with the knowledge that Margaret was infertile (she had had two tubal pregnancies), and that she was seeking motherhood by adoption. The three couples who seemed most to want babies also expressed the most anger about social worker treatment of infertility. Bill and Rose were told they weren't ready to be parents and needed a year of marital therapy. Both Charlie and Marie and Elaine and Michael were offended at being told they should not be trying to conceive a child at the same time they were pursuing adoption.

Frank and Stephanie came to adoption unconcerned about infertility. Whether they "birthed" a child or adopted a child was insignificant and Stephanie says she had thought about adopting since she was twelve "because there are children without parents." She and Frank never sought medical help when pregnancy didn't happen, Stephanie says she never "felt that . . . compulsion to birth" and Frank says, "Neither of us had very strong feeling about . . . the need to have our genes passed on." They found that domestic adoption meant very long waiting lists whereas Korean adoption seemed easy, they knew several people who had adopted from Korea and they didn't "feel the need to have a Caucasian baby." Would they have gone through a public agency? "No, never. We were nervous about that." They also adopted infants.

Deciding to adopt an older child turned Fred and Stella away from domestic sources for two reasons: "the condition that an older child would be in having come through the DSS system" and "the number of kids whose parents or family members can make a claim on a child . . . way down the line." They chose Russia because there the children are not being bounced around in foster care. That nervousness regarding foster care and the Department of Social Services is borne out by Ken and Margaret. Although they knew the two foster children in their home had been abused, Ken says they decided to end their involvement because "we didn't want all the . . . interruptions . . . . they kept taking those kids away every two or three days to visit" and "those kids would come back from being up there for the day, they were bouncing off the walls;

you couldn't deal with them." Children in foster care are perceived to have endured extraordinary disruption, not the least of which is the attempt to keep the biological family together. Stella says it most clearly. "I see . . . a lot of kids who are twelve and thirteen years old who are in placement situations that have been temporary forever. And who . . . within one school year may be in three different places, never really sure who they're going to be living with, what school they are going to be going to." She adds, "I personally don't particularly approve of the idea of keeping children with biological parents at any cost."

These couples did not become parents by accident. There is nothing unplanned about adoption. "The decision to adopt a child requires sufficient acceptance of one's inability to reproduce to make adoption feel like a necessary, viable, and acceptable alternative" (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 52). The decisions these couples made about adoptive parenthood seem to have had several important dimensions, one of which was infertility. Perhaps because their reactions were so individual and so private, the couples did not speak about their infertility in much detail. It is interesting to note, however, that they did not show any preference for adopting girls over boys. Rosenberg points out (p. 60) that there is often a preference for girls over boys which can be interpreted "as a reluctance to pass the family name down by means of a non biological child."

What seemed to be more important than biology to these couples was adopting an infant. Presumably, this was linked to their desire to duplicate biological parenthood to the extent possible. For Michael and Elaine and for Bill and Rose, a Caucasian infant was apparently the reason to pursue designated adoptions. Charlie and Marie and Frank and Stephanie seem to have wanted babies too, but Caucasian babies were not necessary. After the fact, Ken and Margaret also found a baby important; they can compare raising Anne to raising the two foster children and recognize that a baby is

easier. Probably because Fred and Stella were already biological parents, adopting a baby was not so significant to them. They had had that experience.

A third issue is that of private versus public adoption. Although private adoption is very expensive, only one couple felt it was prohibitive. The others came up with the $10,000 - $12,000, for two reasons no doubt: (a) it helped insure their adoption of a baby and (b) it meant they could avoid adopting children who had been in foster care after removal from their biological homes. This is my interpretation, however; none of the couples ever said, directly, that babies were essential. Because it is well known that children who have unstable early lives are challenging to raise, it should not surprise anyone that these couples wanted babies.

Parenting is both a joy and a responsibility. Having babies does mean having to tell them about adoption. This is not a task parents enjoy and as the baby grows older, the necessity for confronting it becomes more insistent. When a child wants to know where babies come from, the truth of an adoptee's story has to be explained.

Telling About Adoption: A Developmental Task

Parents of young adoptees need to be communicating about the meaning of adoption, that is telling the story and acknowledging the pain and sadness their children face as they come to understand that they were given away. They must recognize the temperamental characteristics of the adoptee and the hereditary differences between themselves and the child, while at the same time claiming the child as their own.

All of these parents expect to explain adoption to their children. They have been attentive to their children developmentally, so premature disclosure does not seem to be an issue. This is important since research on children's cognitive development done by Brodzinsky and his associates indicates "that children are incapable of comprehending

the concept of adoption until age six or seven and that younger children, with their immature thinking processes, inevitably distort information they may have been given about their origins" (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 72).

Elaine has pointed out the hospital to James where he spent three months in the neonatal unit and thinks that taking him to meet their wonderful perinatologist would help her tell him. At four he knows where babies come from Elaine says, "but it's scary thinking of telling him" about adoption. Margaret says that Anne, who is also four, hasn't given her any opening yet to explain adoption. Anne sees nursing mothers at her day care and she pulls up her own shirt to nurse her dolls, but Margaret doesn't feel she's old enough to understand adoption and "she hasn't asked me about when I was pregnant with her or anything like that."

Michael and Liam are both six. Marie indicates that Michael, from India, talks about his skin and hair color a lot. She is glad he sees "role models" on television and says that they are friendly with a number of interracial families, all of which they hope will be normalizing for their children. She and Charlie say nothing about explaining adoption. They seem more attuned to racial issues than adoption ones. Rose, on the other hand, is pretty sure that Liam is a bit confused, "cause even though I've explained to him that most families come by the baby growing in the mother's belly . . . it came to my understanding a few weeks ago that he didn't realize . . . he thought it was the other way around. He was surprised when he saw somebody who was pregnant . . . ."

Liam is also showing fears about losing Bill and Rose. He has been very tearful over the death of an uncle, he gets clingy and difficult when Bill goes out of town on business and has asked lots of questions about what will happen to him if Rose and Bill die. They have been reassuring about which family members would take care of him and how he would get to their house. In adoption conversations they have talked about how "the woman in whose belly he grew was smart enough to pick them for parents."

They do not say anything, however, to indicate they understand the necessity for adoptees to grieve over their losses (Nickman, 1985).

Stephanie, a helping professional, is the only parent to speak about issues of loss and how painful it must be for an adoptee. Speaking of Lee she says, "How can a child of eight understand why her birth mother couldn't keep her with her;" "there are times when I feel she's just grieving;" "I feel like there's probably a lot that she's thinking that she's not talking about." Stephanie differentiates loss, adoption and race and says that Lee is proud of her Korean heritage and does little assemblies at school, but she doesn't talk about adoption. Marie, on the other hand, hopes that involvement in Indian cultural activities will somehow substitute for the Indian families lost by Michael and Tina. It is almost as if she believes the racial issue is more important than adoption because she knows it cannot proclaims them to be an adoptive family.

Clearly, Stephanie is cognizant of all the adoption issues. It is also true that Lee is eight and precocious, having shown "an awareness of the birth mother at age three." Her brother Kim, who like James and Anne is four, shows no signs of similar awareness. He knows that he and his sister were born in Korea and will point out people on the street with similar skin color, but does not understand "what it means to be born." Stephanie says she wouldn't be surprised if Kim thought he was "birthed on the plane by the plane or something like that" since he sees the video of his homecoming every year.

In fact, Frank and Stephanie seem reasonably comfortable with the notion that adoptive families are not quite the same as biological families, although it is Stephanie who is more insistent about it. She points out that there were a few short years when they could just be parents of babies and do universal parenting things like feeding and diapering and cuddling and toilet training, but that changes as children grow older. She was aware at the time of adoption that it would not be the same as having biological children. Frank only says "negatives" are close to the surface of Stephanie's

consciousness and that he prefers to focus on the "positives" rather than worry. They refer to this as his denial and her vigilance.

All these parents have claimed the adoptees as their own children. Even Olga has been claimed. Stella says that she's only been here for nine weeks and they're already feeling proud of her and as if she belongs to them. They didn't think it would happen so fast. Margaret says she had had no experience with babies and was nervous, so until Anne was six months old, she felt as if she didn't really love her. Marie points out the differences between Michael and Tina which were hard for her in the beginning (because Tina wasn't cuddly), have disappeared now. Nor do there seem to be any problems with "goodness of fit." Temperamentally, the parents and adoptees are evidently well matched (Rosenberg, p. 66). Ken thinks Anne is "the most determined, strongest willed kid I've ever seen" and says that it will "hold her in good stead" in the future.

The prospect of disclosing the adoption is uncomfortable. None of the parents says anything to indicate they know why disclosure is necessary though, if asked, it is likely they would talk in terms of the child not hearing it from someone else. It does seem that Liam, who is six and has gotten clingy and tearful may be grieving and/or worrying about why he was given away and the possibilities of being reclaimed or, worse yet, losing his adoptive parents, but Bill and Rose don't speculate on that. They may be unaware of the possibility. Stephanie wonders if Lee who is eight has such worries and says, " . . . she does need to be a perfect child and she said that . . . And she can't articulate why, but I think I know why. It is like on some level I think she feels that she was . . . rejected . . . for being imperfect." Stephanie has gone to adoption conferences and "seen tapes of kids interviewed and underneath it all they feel like they were a bad baby." This is precisely the sort of issue pointed out by Donovan and McIntyre (1990, pp. 206- 209) in their discussion of the cognitive burdens faced by adoptees trying to make sense of their relinquishment. They may feel they were bad.

It almost seems as if these parents need to understand the "giving away" of a baby entirely in terms of the blessing it is to them. Margaret says it most clearly. "I get all choked up because I really think it was . . . a miracle that someone actually gave us a kid." That their blessing may be quite a mixed blessing for the child seems not to have occurred to these parents. Certainly, it is a cognitive challenge to acknowledge the heredity and the painful losses of one's adoptive children while at the same time feeling safe about one's position as the "real" parent. Disclosing adoption can feel like the ultimate parenting test on which the permanency of the parent-child relationship hinges (Rosenberg, 1992). The three couples who adopted internationally will not be able to dodge it easily. The children from India and Korea do not look like their parents and Olga will have memories of Russia. Adopting an older child or adopting interracially automatically means that family members will have to confront adoption issues more openly. They cannot be hidden. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that these parents don't expect adoption to raise any particular issues for the family.

Adoption Docsn't Make Any Difference

Except for Frank and Stephanie, the couples seem to be operating from the premise that families formed by adoption are little different from biological families. And it is the male partners who often voice that most openly. Charlie says, "Adoption's very little different from having biological kids . . . I believe." Marie: "On a day to day basis it's not different at all." Bill acknowledges that Liam will have one more issue to throw at them during his adolescent rebellion, "You're not my Father," but essentially he and Rose felt comfortable adopting "our own child for . . . however long it lasts, I hope forever, that looks kind of like us in some ways." Rose: " . . . it is just being a family which is a rocky road, but no different than anybody else's." Michael and Elaine emphasize that they don't think of James as adopted. Michael: "It's just a natural thing

with me . . . it's just . . . my child. And just like everyone else's child, he's going to have . . . some kind of problems through his teenage years and . . . maybe he'll have some problems with being adopted . . . but I can't imagine he will. I mean we're both open and have positive attitudes and I can't imagine him having any issues . . . because we don't have any issues with it." Ken is emphatic that "the adoption factor isn't a factor. Anne is here and we are here, it's a family and we go on. It wouldn't have been any different had it been biological." Even Fred and Stella who brought Olga home so recently say that people are more interested in why they adopted from Russia than why they adopted an older child. Fred: "Our family has changed dramatically since we got Olga, but its because of the addition of a new child. I don't think it has much to do with the fact that she's adopted." Stella: "No, it's the new personality." Fred and Stella also make clear that they would love to talk about adoption and that they don't regard questions as intrusive.

These couples with young children had difficulty speculating about the future. In terms of forecasting, Marie was unusual in that she wondered what Tina would be like as a teenager, since she had already exhibited so many behavioral changes. Marie says that she hopes the fact that "Tina and I aren't biologically connected . . . won't affect the way I deal with her or the way I feel about her." Charlie then becomes reassuring and says, "I think it would be the same as with other kids." He says, "our social worker did bring up various issues about teenagers and adoption . . . to warn us and help us think about it . . . right now I'm not too concerned about it." Ken, Fred, Bill and Frank have much the same view: having an adoptive teenager won't be that different, although Stephanie does wonder about teenage dating and how her children's social life will be affected because they're Asians living in a White society. Michael said he didn't know what the future would be like, at which point Elaine laughed and said, "He doesn't think that way." Michael then went on to say that he couldn't imagine having much in the way of problems. Charlie and Ken, the men who were most emphatic on the "adoption

makes no difference" theme, had wives who maintained basic agreement with their husbands while suggesting alternative ways of thinking about it. So Ken says, " the adoption factor isn't a factor" and Margaret agrees but says, "I think it will be a factor once it starts to be a common topic of conversation." Charlie and Marie talk about adoption being the same as having biological kids and then Marie says, "In fact, sometimes I think I would be harder on a child who was biologically mine because I would see things of myself that I didn't like in that child. And these children I don't have that feeling at all. I feel like everything they came with is . . . not my fault and I don't have myself to praise or blame about it."

It is not that these couples are trying to ignore adoption. They are open about the way in which their family was formed. Except for Stephanie, however, they seem to think about adoption from their own point of view. They do not indicate that aspects of it might be problematic for their children. Buttressing this sense are the couples' responses to open adoption. None seemed to have much understanding of it, generally assuming it meant that the birth parents would be too close physically and too likely to interfere with their parenting. They did not understand that a level of contact would be agreed upon at the time of placement (Demmick and Wapner, 1988). Five couples saw it as "not for us," "for somebody else maybe," but "we're too private," "it's a privacy issue" for our child who may not want to deal with them; even Stephanie fears it might be too confusing for the child, while Frank would want the birth parent(s) to "vicariously" enjoy the kids' achievements "from way out there geographically" and send a card once a year.

This concern that open adoption would bring the biological family into closer than comfortable contact seems to run counter to the couples' general agreement that adoptees have a right to the historical information in their sealed records. They realize that adoptees may want or need to search for their birth parents, but seem to think it will be almost impossible for their own children to do it. Bill and Rose can't imagine that

Liam would ever be able to find the homeless pair who gave him life or that they would search out Liam. Charlie and Marie were told that Indian birth mothers are so ashamed that they give false names and addresses to the orphanages, so "we won't have to deal with this." Frank and Stephanie believe that "we are in a situation [Korea] where there's a good likelihood they'll never know them, never meet them . . ." Michael and Elaine have a very limited open adoption; they sent a letter for the first three years and a picture the first year, but didn't agree to anything further despite agency encouragement to do so. They want to protect James' privacy, although they met "his parents and it was reassuring that they were two nice kids, they were smart, they were nice." Fred and Stella say there are secrecy laws in Russia too and they can imagine Olga having lots of questions about her family, but the orphanage hasn't even told the grandmother that Olga has left the country. Even Ken and Margaret who know where Anne's birth parents are and could probably locate them say, "they don't know where we live though." Margaret doesn't "really want them to know where we are until she gets older" and says that maybe by the time Anne decides she wants to meet them "at that point we won't know where they are."

In other words, there's not much inclination on the part of these couples to acknowledge the birth family. They would just as soon forget about them. They're glad to be parents and feel good about adoption, but they don't regard having formed a family by adoption as being much different from being biological parents. In Kirk's terms, it would seem they are "rejecting difference," which according to Brodzinsky (1987a) may be valid while the children are still young and basic trust in family relations is being built.

Overall, adoptive parents tell about forming their families in ways that are reminiscent of the pregnancy and delivery stories of biological parents. If one in a group of women is "expecting," all the women will be comparing notes and telling about their experiences with morning sickness, food cravings, due dates and weight

gain; or it may be about cervical dilation, the baby "dropping," going to the hospital, hours of labor or unexpected "C-sections." Adoptive parent stories involve finding an agency, dealing with the terrible social workers and/or the wonderful social workers, deciding what kind of adoption to pursue, coming up with the money and managing all the paperwork. Characteristics like age, health, finances, personal and marital stability and extended family relationships are scrutinized and judged (Rosenberg, 1992) And then, remarkably, a family is born when the adoptee joins the couple.

Bill and Rose changed Liam's diaper right on the lawyer's conference room table. When they picked her up at the hospital, Ken handed Anne in her red stocking to Margaret's mother and said, "Merry Christmas Grandma." Michael and Elaine made tapes for a little Walkman with "nice classical music and fetal heartbeats" that James could hear in his isolette in the neonatal intensive care unit. Frank was so nervous he couldn't eat when Lee was coming into the airport from Korea. Now, these parents by adoption face the future expecting that family life will be pretty much the same as it is for biological families. Unfortunately, this posture does not acknowledge the fact that some aspects of parenting are very challenging for adoptive families. Those who are in the launching stage of the family life cycle have had more exposure to this truth.

Adoptive Parents in the Launching Stage of Family Development

These six couples are all Caucasian and between them have adopted fourteen children, although only seven of them are in the launching stage, six females and one male. One of these adoptions was international, the rest were domestic. Three children were six years old when they came home and four were infants. Three were placed through public agencies like the Department of Social Services. One adoptee came from Latin America, one is African-American, two are of mixed racial heritage and three are White.

Here are the couples. Their profile narratives are presented here in vignettes for the purpose of identification. The names are all pseudonyms. The couples are: Marie and Atherton and adoptees Ivan (25) and Roann (21); Josephine and Fred and adoptee Nancy Ann (23); Gail and George and adoptee Ayeesha (24) and 6 other adoptees ages 6-16; Jo and Jean Pierre and adoptees Ana (20) and Eduardo (12); Millie and Stan and adoptee Victoria (17); and Tami and Bill and adoptee Susan (17). The theme of each couple's narrative has been used as the title.

A Needy Child Dominates Parenting: Marie and Atherton, Adoptees Ivan and Roann, ages 25 and 21

Marie and Atherton are in their mid-fifties, Caucasian and Roman Catholic and have worked in the human service and educational fields all their lives. Atherton has an advanced degree. Their children, Ivan and Roann, were adopted as babies at six weeks and two weeks respectively in traditional closed proceedings. They are of mixed racial heritage, Ivan being part Native-American and Roann part African-American. Neither of them lives at home. There is no history of adoption in Marie's family. As an adult, however, Atherton's father discovered that his father was actually his step-father.

Marie and Atherton's perspective on adoption has been colored by parenting a child with a disability. Without any background information on Ivan's birth family, they had difficulty from the outset. Atherton mentions various diagnoses for Ivan saying, "When he was a baby he was one of those kids who rocked in his crib, excessively. He banged his head." "Today, he would be diagnosed as a 'failure to thrive' infant." And "he turned out to be a very . . . severely impaired special needs child." Ivan "went to nursery school and we knew right away that he was really different from the other kids." He worked with a child psychologist for about ten years from age four to fourteen. Atherton also says that there were autistic symptoms and neurotic symptoms and that as an adult Ivan required psychiatric care. He now suspects

fetal alcohol syndrome. The most definitive professional information he and Marie have is that Ivan suffered "some kind of brain damage at birth." Doctors would describe his "inability to bond" as if "you and I were walking around without any skin . . . . or with the volume on a Walkman turned up to ten all the time. . . . That's how his personality functions. In other words, it's very hard for him to get close to anybody because of that severe anxiety of relationship."

For Marie and Atherton, an early adoption problem with Ivan was feeling that they were inadequate as parents, so the adoption of Roann was a great relief. Marie says, "She was so normal . . . it was such a pleasure to have a normal infant around the house and to realize that we hadn't done anything wrong. You know that it was not us, it was a problem that he brought to us." As a family, however, they were affected; often they each took one child separately in order to minimize difficulties. Marie says, "Just being in the car going the four miles to [town] could be an absolute disaster. Because [Ivan] always knew which buttons to push to get what kind of response he wanted out of people and he just made it very difficult to be a family. And so we didn't do a lot of things. We didn't go a lot of places, it was even difficult to leave him with a sitter." Atherton adds, "We couldn't function socially as a family . . . even with a lot of therapy and intervention; we worked on family meetings and family therapy and a whole lot of things, but this kid was just a real handful."

At the present time, Ivan has finally graduated from college and gone on to graduate school. He claims to have no interest in adoption and in adulthood has created a new identity for himself, even changing his name. Roann, on the other hand, has shown an interest in searching from time to time and recently contacted a search consultant. Her parents are supportive, although they wonder how she'll respond when or if she finds out some of the reasons she was relinquished.

Marie and Atherton were an idealistic young couple living in an interracial neighborhood when they started forming their adoptive family. Today they look back

quite reflectively. Atherton says that raising a special needs child provided him valuable personal and professional growth; although it took a "heavy toll on our marriage and relationship, in the end I think it made us closer." Marie realizes that going back to work when Roann was three was "my salvation" and wishes that she had been able to "walk away from some of the turmoil" instead of allowing herself to be engaged in it when Ivan was young. Adoption has been a "bittersweet" experience for them because, as Atherton says, "When you raise a special needs kid, it just skews everything." As an educator he is invested in the belief that children must acquire parenting skills "as they go through life. Because as we learned certainly, and all adoptive parents learn, all biological parents learn, they don't give you a manual . . . with a baby."

A Happy Family: Josephine and Fred, Adoptee Nancy Ann, age 23

Josephine and Fred are a Caucasian Protestant couple, high school graduates about fifty years old, who live and work in the vicinity in which they grew up. Fred is on a building and grounds crew while Josephine works part time in a business office. They adopted Nancy Ann in infancy. She had been relinquished by a woman who already had three other children and came home to Josephine and Fred when she was only three days old. She is now twenty-three. Her adoptive parents say "she has been our joy" and that they are "blessed" because, as Fred says, "I think she has just made us more of a family."

Josephine and Fred have a traditional view of adoption. They haven't talked about it much in the family; their emphasis has been on being the same as other families. Early on, when Fred's Mother broached the subject of Nancy Ann's birth mother, Josephine made it clear that this was not a topic for discussion. Fred says he thinks many people never really knew she was adopted and Josephine believes that it's something you don't talk about a lot. "I think it would be uncomfortable for her if I

went around telling everyone I met that Nancy Ann was adopted. It wouldn't make her feel like she was part of our family." That's important. Josephine notes that "she has our mannerisms and . . . our coloring . . . and she does things, I notice, that her Father does and different things that I do." Nancy Ann, however, does talk about her adoption some and when she was in high school at least, shared that information with some girlfriends. She also has some cousins who are adoptees and Josephine's aunt relinquished a child who was reunited with their family after fifty years.

Apparently, Josephine and Fred received a good bit of information about Nancy Ann when she was placed and they have been willing to share it with her. Josephine thinks that Nancy Ann has not expressed much curiosity about her roots "because I have told her as much as we know and satisfied her questions when she asked them." Fred says that she has "never expressed" any desire to find her birth family. Josephine says they would help her if that desire were expressed, but "I've also told her that she does not have the right to just go barging in on her birth mother. That her birth mother would need to be approached, because she's chosen not to tell the world that she had this child." This was also the stance taken by Josephine's aunt when her birth child first contacted her, that "it would be too difficult . . . for her to deal with." Only after her death did the rest of the family meet this cousin.

Nancy Ann graduated from a private high school. She did not go on to college, at least in part because her parents made sure she was not pressured to go. She has been in the work force since graduation. She also had a brief, unfortunate marriage. The pain of its ending was difficult for the family and Nancy Ann was quite emotionally dependent on her parents for some time afterwards. Josephine reports that Nancy Ann is now reading a book about fathers and daughters which elaborates on the significance of this relationship to mate choice.

Josephine and Fred got a lot of pleasure out of talking about their family. Fred commented that no one had ever asked them about adoption issues before. For

Josephine, it was an opportunity to become "verbally aware that Nancy Ann is well rounded and that she's happy and not . . . seeking out . . . well I would think that if a child is looking for more identity [birth parents,] there would be something missing in their identity that they have now. She's happy with the identity she has now."

<u>We Are the Family We've Become: Gail and George, Adoptee Ayeesha, age 24 and six other adoptees ages 6 to 14</u>

Gail and George are a Caucasian couple in their fifties who are employed as foster parents for the Department of Social Services. They are not educated beyond high school and were unfamiliar with adoption until Ayeesha came home at three months. Gail and George adopted her in the early 70's when they heard there was a need for homes for Black children; they had two biological sons and "why have a child of our own when there were kids already waiting for families." Ayeesha had been in three foster homes when she was placed with them. George's brother adopted a child at much the same time.

According to her parents, Ayeesha had a hard time growing up in a small, very provincial White community. She was stared at and discriminated against and they didn't really know how to help her. They did meet a Black family in a neighboring town who offered to help with Ayeesha's hair. Gail says, "I had a difficult time teaching her the pride and the things that Black Moms teach their kids. I think it took till she was a teenager for me to really understand how difficult it was for her." Gail did have Black relatives in another state. Ayeesha began visiting them when she was twelve and George indicates that these trips gave her "more Black culture . . . than we were able to do." Gail adds that "as a young adult Ayeesha has really sought out her people. Although she is friends with both, I think connecting her kids to their African heritage . . . she's very mindful of, given the way she grew up . . . . For years I kept thinking, God is this a mistake? What have I done to this kid? But it's come out okay

in the end. . . . There weren't many choices for a Black kid in those days . . . it was foster care or adoption with a White family, that was about it."

When Ayeesha was nine, Gail and George became foster parents. They had not been able to afford the adoption of another Black child to be Ayeesha's sister, so foster parenting allowed them "to have more children and financially afford it." They thought of foster parenting as an interim arrangement "until the parents could take them back." What they learned was that you get kids who are "less behaviorally involved initially, "because you don't have the skills; over time they "developed a reputation. . . for handling difficult kids" and soon found they were getting children with emotional problems, medical problems, developmental delays and so forth. "And little by little we grew to realizing and recognizing that what we liked was the medically involved developmentally delayed kids." By the time a six-year-old boy with palsy and feeding tubes and a trache arrived, "we had an itch!" They adopted him. Five more special needs youngsters have been adopted into the family too. Gail and George will discontinue foster parenting once the toddler they have now has been transitioned into an adoptive family.

Gail and George speak of having two families. "The first family we had when they were little, when the two boys and Ayeesha were little, that was like a first family. Sort of . . . really just felt like our sweet kids." The second group of adopted kids are all special needs kids who couldn't find families. Gail says, "Although I love them all, [this is] sort of more our work than our family." And "we chose to adopt because these kids wouldn't have families. And sort of that happened for Ayeesha a little, but its different from that I think. You know, this wasn't like gee we'd love to have six more kids . . . It's more like we were fostering and these kids couldn't go anywhere."

Since they adopted Ayeesha, Gail and George have learned a great deal about adoption. They realize that they had no training for it when they brought her home and that they could have used it. Their approval process went very quickly and little

checking was done. In retrospect they don't really know how they got Ayeesha. "We looked poor, we were poor . . . a beat up old car, not a whole lot of income, two little kids. We were in our twenties. I think [we got her because] we wanted a Black kid." Ayeesha is a single parent now with two pre-school children. She works and began attending college this year.

Accepting Our Children's Health Issues: Jo and Jean Pierre, Adoptees Ana and Eduardo, ages 20 and 12

Jo and Jean Pierre, who are both Caucasian, are Master's level educators working with special needs populations. There is a fifteen year difference in their ages. Jean Pierre had a previous marriage in which he had both biological children and bi-racial adoptive children. He and Jo began adoption proceedings through independent sources in Latin America very soon after their marriage. Ana came home when she was six; Eduardo was eight months.

Both children were born in El Salvador which was war torn at the time of the adoptions. Since the couple was financially strapped and Jo was particularly committed to adopting from Latin America, El Salvador was affordable and also chaotic enough that adoptions were not being highly regulated. Thus Ana and Eduardo were quickly and easily adopted, comparatively speaking. For example, there was no long waiting period; prospective parents were not required to spend weeks in a motel while legal issues were sorted out. Jean Pierre went to El Salvador on a Wednesday and was home with Eduardo on Friday.

War leaves scars. As soon as Eduardo came home, his parents knew that although he was happy, he was not healthy. "He was very atrophied and he couldn't hold his head up." He was a "failure to thrive" baby who had stopped growing and was stimulating himself by rocking, which had taken all the hair off the back of his head. Jo

and Jean Pierre recognized early on that raising him would be an on-going challenge. He is chronologically twelve, but closer to eight and Jo says, "His latest evaluation puts him at an emotional . . . age of about three." Eduardo has been diagnosed as hearing impaired, hyperactive and learning disabled. He takes Ritalin.

Ana was six when she was escorted to the United States along with some other children going to adoptive homes. She stopped speaking Spanish within two months and until she started to high school showed extraordinary academic promise. Difficulties began to emerge in middle school: possible learning disabilities, unacknowledged adoption issues, "she took a very painful dive academically and emotionally." In her second year at a private high school she was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the consequence of some very bad experiences in El Salvador, apparently. Ana managed to graduate from high school and though she has tried college, it is just too difficult for her to study. She has her own apartment which her parents help subsidize, because they understand how necessary it is for her to be physically independent.

When Jo and Jean Pierre talk about their children, they do not indicate, in any way, that adoption is significant to their thinking. Jean Pierre says, "it never, ever comes up . . . . this is an adoptee not a birth child, that never occurs to us." The business of parenting, they say, has been over-riding because their children have so many needs. At another level, however, they indicate their awareness of the expectations they brought to adoption. Ana was in talented and gifted programs, so they had assumed that in their white collar family and community she, of course, would be going to college. They were unprepared for her troubles because "there was a history of many years, five, six, seven years of a really sound kid who had a track that looked like it was going to be healthy." Jo says, "I've come a long way this year. I thought I was doing the right thing for her by helping her go the whole college track . . . I was more involved than I should have been." And Jean Pierre indicates that they've

noticed "When we look at people that we know that have adoptees, there seems to be a higher rate of success . . . in families that aren't as . . . driven. Achievement oriented . . . toward higher education." Jo adds, "I went to a workshop, they said blue collar families do much better with adoption than us white collar professionals. And I think they're right. I really do. There's a lot more disappointment, we expect much more."

It is the fact that Ana and Eduardo have "some peculiar pieces and combinations of disabling conditions" that is the challenge for Jo and Jean Pierre. Birth parent and ethnic identity issues pale by comparison. Nevertheless, Jean Pierre says, "You can't go into adoption without anticipating . . . more problems than you would ever . . . probably . . . anticipate . . . as a biological parent. There's just going to be more . . . there is some history that reveals there's going to be a problem here a problem there. . ." Jo concludes that the real issues are about parenting and parental expectations. "The issues we'd have whether our kids were adoptees or not. So I just think they stop being adoptees."

She Still Needs Us: Millie and Stan, Adoptee Victoria, age 17

Millie and Stan make their home in the local area in which they were born and raised. They are a Caucasian couple, close to fifty. Stan is a college graduate working in marketing and development at this time. Millie has an Associate's degree. She has not worked outside the home since Victoria's arrival, though she was Stan's bookkeeper while he was self-employed.

There is no history of adoption in either of their families, nor did Millie and Stan explore adoption resources. They had a friend employed by the Department of Social Services who arranged for them to become Victoria's foster family after they expressed an interest in adoption. She was the last of four children born to an immature young woman who abused both alcohol and her children. They were also sexually abused in

the extended family. Victoria has a brother who was placed for adoption. Another brother and sister have some contact with her, though the sister has moved elsewhere and has been involved in drugs and prostitution. Victoria was in and out of foster care from the time she was four months old. She was almost six when she came home to Millie and Stan, but it was three more years before she was legally adopted.

It has been difficult for Millie and Stan to tell what is "normal teenage behavior" and "what's coming from her past." Victoria was sexually active at fourteen, has experimented with drinking and run with a wild crowd. In fact, Stan says he'd never want to go through the years when she was fourteen and fifteen again. He has wondered if the fact that he and Millie are "so much older than the average parent" has contributed to Victoria's "problems." Millie says no.

Victoria's education has been a major issue for her parents. Stan, in particular, has a hard time understanding why Victoria has so much trouble with school. She is bright and capable and could get better grades than she does; Millie and Stan, however, have to struggle continually to keep her education on the track. She has gone to summer school to make up course work and improve grades and there have been school discipline problems involving other students, including one that had to be resolved in court.

To their credit, Millie and Stan have not thrown up their hands in despair. They made sure Victoria had birth control information and protection. After one incident, they provided a cellular phone in case she needs to call them or the police when she's out. When there's a fight and she storms out, they know she understands that she can always come home, no matter what. They seem to hold open-house for teenagers who bring their sleeping bags when they come to swim in the pool. Millie says that upstairs and downstairs there are always girls showering, doing their hair or manicuring their nails. And they all still go camping as a family.

Stan believes that the worst is over and that it would have been quite different if Victoria had been in their home right from the beginning. She has "gone to therapy for years" and the family has had therapy too. To the best of their ability, Millie and Stan have followed the advice they received when Victoria came home, making sure she had stable routines and environments. They were hoping that having "lived through everything, everything you can possibly imagine" they were over the hump. Rather precipitously, it seems, Victoria recently withdrew from school and moved out of the house into an apartment with her boyfriend.

The Ups and Downs of Adoption: Tami and Bill, Adoptee Susan, age 17

Tami and Bill are a highly educated, Caucasian Protestant couple. They have advanced degrees and are employed full-time. Tami, who is 48, works as a technical educator and Bill, a cleric, is 54. Both of them were married previously and Tami has a biological daughter. Their decision to adopt an older child was made partly to accommodate their work schedules and partly because they knew that infants were not generally available. They were pleased to get a child as young as six. Bill's cousin is an adoptee as is his sister-in-law. Tami has a brother-in-law who is an adoptee.

Susan came home through the Department of Social Services. Because it is a publically funded agency, the costs of adoption were considerably lower than they are with private agencies and support services were funded. There was also some required training for prospective adopters. Susan had been removed from her biological parents' home by the time she was a year old and placed in foster care. When the Department discovered she was being abused in the foster home, a second foster placement was made, for about a year, until an adoptive family could be located.

When Tami and Bill talk about their family, they do so in terms which reflect how unprepared they feel they were for adoptive parenthood. Probably because Susan was older when she came home and had had painful life experiences prior to placement, she

has expressed a lot of anger and done a lot of testing. Tami and Bill have learned a great deal about themselves in the process, but they have trouble deciding if issues that come up are adoption related or abuse related or just adolescence. Bill says, "It's very hard to know what we're dealing with. What is normal, quote, unquote." When Susan was young "she was incredibly dependent on us for everything . . . she couldn't even tie her shoes. We got to the point where she wouldn't get to school on time because she was spending too much time tying her shoes." And Tami says that "when she got to be a teenager, she had these incredible temper tantrums. And . . . would try to drive us also, make us angry and engage us and usually successfully."

The result for Tami and Bill has been uncertainty about the strength of their ties with Susan. They have often wondered just how attached Susan is to them. When she was younger, they noticed that she related to others the same way she did to them. "It was all the same to her. It didn't matter where she was, it was the same level of belonging." And Bill indicates that Susan "always felt that she could have had a better set of adoptive parents. We didn't have a farm, we didn't let her have a horse. Her brother could have adopted her . . . ."

Recently, Susan had a reunion with her birth family; she found that her birth mother is deceased and her birth father institutionalized, but there are adult siblings as well as extended family. Since the reunion, Tami and Bill feel there has been a shift. "She's shared more with us in the last two months than . . . she has in ten or twelve years." Tami says that just growing is part of it too and that the last family vacation was the best one ever. Susan, however, acknowledges the clarification the reunion has given her. When she met her brother and spent time with him he said, "You are so lucky . . . to have Bill and Tami as your parents." And they report that Susan responded, "without our prompting her, 'I feel so lucky.' "

With the preceding information about the couples as background, they will now be considered in terms of the period of time during which they adopted, their handling

of the developmental task of launching, and their reflections on adoptive parenting. Links to the adoption literature will be made.

How They Became Parents by Adoption

These six couples have been adoptive parents for much longer than the previous set. Tami and Bill and Millie and Stan have had Susan and Victoria, both 17, with them for eleven years while the other adoptees are in their twenties. The couples tend not to mention infertility. Marie does say they saw doctors and had tests to "check your biological chart" and decided to "start the process for adoption, because we had by that time determined that we were both of low fertility." Fred only says, "We couldn't have no children." Millie and Stan say nothing on this subject, and Tami and Bill say "nothing happened." Gail and George, of course, had two biological children before they adopted Ayeesha and because Jean Pierre had had a vasectomy, adoption was the only choice for him and Jo. At that time, of course, infertility treatment was nothing like the scientifically advanced procedures of today. The first in vitro births were not much more than ten years ago.

It is also noticeable that these couples, seemingly, did not spend much time researching adoption to find out what kind of child would suit them. They used agencies that were close to their homes and affordable. Marie had worked for the agency that did their home study for Ivan. Tami and Bill, Jo and Jean Pierre, Gail and George all mention that their financial status was significant. Of course there was not the array of choices there is today, particularly in terms of private agencies with ties to sources in other countries. Nor were these couples nervous about the Department of Social Services and foster placement. In all probability they didn't think that there was cause for concern. Public awareness of childhood neglect and/or physical and sexual abuse is relatively recent after all. It is also noticeable that they don't indicate any

dissatisfaction with their agencies or the services they received. There are no complaints about social workers. Hindsight does not seem to concern them with regard to the choices they made.

These adoptions were also taking place in the liberated 1970's and the early 1980's, a period when more abortions were being performed, when unmarried women began keeping their babies rather than surrendering them for adoption and when social acceptance of interracial relationships began growing. Thus, Gail and George who had two biological sons and wanted a little girl "began to hear . . . that there was a real need for homes for bi-racial kids, particularly Black kids at that time," and decided they could do that. It should be noted that Gail had cousins who were Black. Marie and Atherton were living in an interracial neighborhood and he worked for the Urban League when they became adoptive parents. They "told both agencies that we were willing to take children of mixed racial background." "Ivan really . . . technically, while he is of mixed racial heritage, he is Caucasian, he's a quarter Native American. But Roann is a quarter Afro-American. So it's . . . more visible in her than it is in him." Marie says that when they were ready to adopt the second time, "we knew there were no White infants or older children even." Atherton adds that this was close to the time of the policy announcement by the National Association of Black Social Workers that Black children should be raised in Black families, not adopted by White parents. "Basically, I feel very strongly that there are thousands of children who need homes and that argument is theoretically correct but practically . . . impossible. And if there are people who are going to raise children, in homes . . . is more important than in institutions."

That humanitarian tone is also present in the way Susan and Victoria's parents talk about adoption. Tami and Bill mention how much need there is for adoptive homes, it was part of their motivation to adopt, and wonder what Susan's life would have been had they not adopted her, "if she hadn't gotten out of there . . . and to that extent a real

difference has been made . . . ." Bill: "What would her life have been like? And, you know, for all the pain and hell it's been, it's been worth every minute." Tami: "A lot of times people will ask, about adoption, . . . it's tough, but . . . every child has a right to be in a home where they're loved and part of a family . . . and . . . people should do it and people should do it more." Tami and Bill also say they couldn't have handled another adoption. They refused when the Department of Social Services asked them about adopting again. Millie and Stan also speak about the importance of children having homes and not "just moving from place to place" and that society should "lavish support on them, education, counseling" to ensure that they'll be able to function successfully as adults. Millie feels that Victoria "will function and be able to take care of herself." Stan: "I do feel a great feeling of accomplishment in giving something back to society by taking Victoria in and bringing her all the way up."

Gail and George speak of the "pain of children and families" and the rewards they've found in fostering and adopting. George says "In your life I think you need to pick a child and hustle and bustle, doin' things for a child." Gail: "There's so many kids without families. But I think if people would just understand what meaning it could give them. I look at families who don't know about any of this, who don't know about the abuse and neglect and the pain of families and kids and all that stuff we've been working on for sixteen years, who don't know . . . how your life grows and changes and your awareness and they don't have a clue." "It isn't like we're just affecting this child. This is affecting everything he'll be connected to for the rest of his life, whether they're [our] foster or adopted kids. I just wish more families could do it. Even one kid. I look at people who are going to work every day raising their own two or three kids and think, how boring!"

Unlike the group of adoptive parents considered previously, these couples seem to have come to adoption much more spontaneously. They are more reticent about their infertility and have little or nothing to say about agency process or social workers. For

both financial and public service reasons, Tami and Bill selected the Department of Social Services. Jo and Jean Pierre acted as their own social workers in a sense, although they had an agency liaison for legal purposes when they brought Ana and Eduardo from El Salvador. It seems likely that neither they nor the parents of Susan and Victoria had much background on older child adoptions, or if they did they may have discounted it. Marie and Atherton were never able to get any background history to explain Ivan's difficulties.

Whereas the first group of parents were very concerned about pre-adoptive history and avoidant of children who had been in foster care, all these couples seem to have been surprised by the intensity of the issues that their children's pre-adoptive and/or biological history brought to their parenting. Under the circumstances, perhaps it is quite natural that they would find solace in humanitarianism. It is also true that they have probably grown and stretched in ways they never anticipated.

Developmental Tasks in the Launching Stage of Family Development

Late adolescence and early young adulthood are times of transition in all families, but especially in adoptive families; adoptive adolescent demands for freedom and independence carry a heavy emotional charge. During this period, many adoptees test their family membership "--that is, behaving as if not a member of [the] family. . . 'Are we still a family if I am rude? How about if I am a slob? A slut? How about a delinquent? How about whatever I know you don't approve of? . . . the test is real and parents [may] find themselves not really liking or approving of their children" (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 79). The adoptee, however, is struggling to find an identity and that means somehow combining both the biological and the psychological heritages (p. 78). They must "emancipate themselves from the adoptive family in order to make room to explore other parts of themselves" and doing so may "involve a conscious or

unconscious wish to search for the birth parents" (pp. 80-81). The challenge for adoptive parents, therefore, is to support independence without feeling abandoned and to recognize their adoptee's interest in the birth family "as a natural developmental step," not "an act of disloyalty."

The timing and intensity of these struggles will depend entirely on the family members and their relationships. It is also quite possible that they will be mixed into the launching process which involves the entrances and exits of young people as they establish separate lives. In many families, freedom and independence are closely linked to entrances and exits. The traditional ways for affecting this shift from living at home to being out of the parental home are that the young person marries or joins the military or goes away to college. The parents are referred to as "letting go:" they are allowing and/or encouraging the young person to leave.

It is interesting that some of these adoptive parents speak of this transition so casually. They provide little or no detail. Since none of the adoptees except Susan is living at home, they appear to be launched. Ayeesha (24), for example, is the single parent of two pre-school children. Now, she works and attends college, but Gail and George say nothing about the circumstances under which she left home or about their grandchildren. They do allude to teenage visits with Gail's Black cousins that gave Ayeesha "more Black culture" and say that "as a young adult Ayeesha has really sought out her people." Gail only says, "I think we love each other and I think it's been wonderful."

Josephine and Fred mention, without elaboration, that Nancy Ann "was disappointed in a relationship and that's been sad." "You hurt for your children when they hurt." It was only at the checkback that they said she had been married at twenty for about a year and then divorced. There was no mention of the circumstances. Marie and Atherton are quiet about Roann too, except to say "she got herself in a lot of jams as a teenager." They do say that Ivan left home to attend private schools when he was

fourteen and went to camp over some summers as well. As an adult he changed his name. Atherton: He's twenty-five and he's graduating from [a university] this spring, after several years of being out of school." " . . . we still have a connection with him and I think in the way that he can, he feels supported and loved by us, but he is mentally ill, I mean it's a real struggle for him to feel close to us or anybody."

Keeping Victoria's education on the track has been a continual struggle for Millie and Stan. He is insistent on the importance of education to earning a living. Stan describes himself between the ages of 14 and 25 as being in trouble all the time, hanging around cars and grease and garages and disappointing his parents on a regular basis. His high school and college graduations are momentous achievements in Stan's recounting of his family history. Millie was a good student who loved school and had perfect attendance. Why Victoria has so much trouble with school is a mystery to them, since she is bright and capable and could do well. She has had to go to summer school to make up course work and grades and there have been in-school discipline issues involving other students, including one that had to be resolved in court. They were hoping that Victoria had a goal of graduating from high school because no one in her biological family has a diploma. Instead, Victoria abruptly quit school and moved into an apartment with her boyfriend. In another connection, Millie had said that " . . . Victoria has a strong desire to . . . get married and have a baby. Okay. She wants . . . to show that . . . someone can be a good mother. . . ." Millie and Stan don't want to see Victoria have a baby any time soon.

Jo and Jean Pierre address the education issue from the vantage point of expectations. Ana showed great academic promise as a youngster and despite her post traumatic stress/learning disabilities diagnoses in high school, they assumed she would go to college. Jo says, "I thought I was doing the right thing for her by helping her go the whole college track. . . . I was more involved than I should have been." And Jean Pierre indicated that they've noticed "When we look at people we know that have

adoptees, there seems to be a higher rate of success . . . in families that aren't as . . . driven. Achievement oriented . . . toward higher education." Jo adds, "I went to a workshop, they said blue collar families do much better with adoption than us white collar professionals. And I think they're right. I really do. There's a lot more disappointment, we expect much more. You know, we expect, well, you know, it's not gene pool, it's, it's nurture not nature; you're in the homes of these two . . . educated people and . . . we have a pound of skills to give you kids."

Ana has tried college, but studying is just too difficult, so she's working. Her parents help subsidize an apartment in a safe neighborhood and her Father says, "even with Ana's disabilities and she has three or four of them, she has not turned to drugs, has not turned to alcohol. She does not smoke. Takes good care of her body." Jo says, "Both of our kids, school is hell. So as soon as they can be in the world of work, they are probably going to be fine. But to get to a place where work is satisfying . . . [Ana] has white collar aspirations for herself, she has set high standards for herself."

All of these adoptees have either separated from their families or are in the process. The way it happened may have been problematic; the parents aren't bragging or strutting about basking in the reflected glory of their kids' accomplishments. Instead, educational dreams had to be abandoned in the cases of Victoria and Ana, Nancy Ann has had a divorce, Ayeesha is a single parent, and Ivan renamed himself. The most important question is whether or not the parents and adoptees are still attached after launching. "These children did not arrive in the usual way; it makes sense that they also will not leave in the usual way" (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 82). For adoptive parents, the issue is the bond and whether the ties and attachments that connect their children with them can survive the complication and intensity of separating. As noted previously, the adoptee's search for the birth family may enter into this equation.

Launching and Search: Developmental Tasks. The developmental task for adoptive parents if and when their children begin to express interest in the birth family is to maintain "faith in the real relationship they have established with the child while they watch him or her appear to reject or disregard its value" (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 81). In this group of adoptees only Susan has had a reunion. Although Tami and Bill do not explain the circumstances of the reunion, they do believe it has been positive. Susan's birth mother is deceased, her birth father is institutionalized, but she met her brothers. One of them told her how fortunate she was to have been adopted; "You are so lucky . . . to have Bill and Tami as your parents," and Susan's agreement with him was very rewarding for Tami and Bill. Speaking about adoption in that context, Tami says, "I feel less negative now than I have in a long long time. So it's different now than it was three months ago. It was different three months ago than it was . . . three or four years before that." At this point, Bill brings the pain and their expectations into focus when he says, "I think of Susan when we first met her . . . and to see the young woman that she is now . . . I really count it in a lot of ways a . . . real privilege to have been part of it. I mean there's a part of me that's always wondered, I guess a sadness in me that I never had biological children, you know . . . but every time I think that, that sadness always meets head on with, well, probably if we had had biological children we wouldn't have had Susan. And . . . I'd rather have Susan." Bill's comments are an excellent example of the way infertility can be an ongoing task for adoptive parents. "Surely, their own fantasized child would not behave in this manner" (Rosenberg, p. 80).

Roann, at 21, has now contacted a search consultant. Her Mother says that a few years ago she expressed mild interest in a search and once even saw her birth mother's name on an original birth certificate when she was applying for a passport. Marie says, ". . . and she gave it back to them without recording, without registering the name and said, 'I don't think I should see this.' And the same thing happened . . . when we

adopted her. The agency sent me some papers to sign and her birth mother's name was on those papers. And I looked at that name and I said, 'I'm not supposed to know that name,' and I forgot it. So that's twice now that we've been presented with this birth mother's name and both of us have pushed it away."

It would be interesting to know if Roann had heard about this incident before she saw the name herself. In any event, her parents don't sound particularly threatened by her search, saying they feel that she is strong and capable and no longer needs their protection. If there were to be a reunion, "I think she would have to deal with what her [birth] mother was going to tell her about some of the reasons that she put her up for adoption. And she might be really angry about that and we'd be there to support her . . . ."

Jo and Jean Pierre say they don't "think it will happen with Ana because she's established that this is her family and . . . she's . . . satisfied with that in most cases. El Salvador scares her." At the checkback, Jo also shared that Ana had begun demonstrating a lot more warmth and affection toward them, most especially toward her Father. They believe that this is partly because the pressure is off Ana now about college. Victoria, of course, knows her birth family probably because she was in foster care with Millie and Stan prior to adoption. A brother and sister have contacted her with some regularity and she has had meetings with each birth parent. Emotionally, these occasions have always been very upsetting for Victoria and probably for Millie and Stan too, although they don't say that. Millie says that Victoria was such a handful that they resisted DSS overtures to take any of her siblings; a little boy they fostered for a time was never freed for adoption and finally they realized that Victoria didn't want another child in the house. Since Victoria moved out, however, she has been in touch with her birth mother who lives in another state. Josephine and Fred say that Nancy Ann has no interest in search because they've shared with her all the information they ever had. They would be worried if she wanted to search, but they would help her.

It is Gail and George who really have some perspective on search. George says, "If a child wants to find his real mom and dad . . . I would help. I think they need to know that mom couldn't really do it. Or dad was never in the picture." Gail adds, "I've talked to Ayeesha about this, she doesn't want to [search.] I support that. That's fine. And I'm not saying it wouldn't hurt, . . . but if she needed to, I'd help her and I think that I would do that for any of the kids. Even knowing, in some of our cases, what they would find would be horrible." And then she says, "[With Ayeesha] I was in fear . . . of her mother wanting her back, of finding her. . . . [search] is something that I've grown to accept and understand and know more about." Gail and George have worked through adoption with about thirty families, "watched them give up their kids, watched their kids being taken away." They have first hand knowledge about the pain "on the other side."

Unlike the previous group of parents with young adoptees who supported search and unsealed records while seeming to think it could not happen to them, these couples know better. Susan had a reunion and her parents feel their family ties are stronger as a result. Sorosky, Baran, and Pannor (1989) report that their review of the data also indicate that adoptive relationships are usually strengthened by reunions. Between the time of the interview and the checkback, Roann contacted a search consultant. Victoria has always had occasional contact with her birth parents; she fears she'll be overweight like her birth mother and was angry when she met her birth father that he refused to meet Millie and Stan and went to the races instead. They say "she still needs us," despite the fact that Victoria moved out. Gail and George have open adoptions with some of their younger adoptees and no longer fear birth families because they have learned so much about them. Even Josephine and Fred, who would worry if Nancy Ann wanted to search, would support her if she wanted to do it, probably because they had a lost family member reappear when Josephine's birth cousin found them after 50 years.

These are the stories of veteran parents. They have learned over time. Unlike the parents of the young adoptees, they never say anything about adoptive families being just the same as biological families. Instead, they are focused on assimilating their experience. They wonder about their parenting and the quality of their relationships with their children. Tami and Bill would like to have a warmer more openly demonstrative relationship with Susan, but aren't sure whether they taught her restraint or whether it's part of the adoption picture. Ivan isn't at all willing to explore adoption issues or even think about being adopted, yet Marie and Atherton feel their connection with him is quite tenuous whereas Josephine and Fred feel close to Nancy Ann, even though she too seems disinterested in adoption. Although it is impossible to tell how these parents who have launched their adoptees feel about this way of forming a family, it is clear that their paths have not been easy. They might not have done it any other way, but they give the impression that it wasn't quite what they expected either.

Reflecting back, Atherton says that the whole adoptive experience has been wonderfully growth producing for him both personally and professionally, but that it took a terrible toll on their marriage and relationship, though in the end they were closer. Marie says, "I was just thinking the other day that I wished that somehow when Ivan was younger and in the house that I would have had the ability to walk away from some of the turmoil that I find myself able to now when he's around, the brief times that he's around and tries . . . to engage me. I find that I'm much stronger and able to say, 'I'm not going to have that discussion with you; I don't want to talk about that; I don't like the way you are doing this.' And just make my statement and walk away. But I think it was just so continuous and there was so little reprieve from it . . . when I was younger . . . that I just couldn't do it. I couldn't separate myself." Tami tells a long story about a battle between Susan and herself in which she learned that very skill of refusing to engage when Susan became angry and verbally abusive. Jo and Jean Pierre reflect back on their own expectations about Ana's education and even inject some

humor into it. Two adoptive mothers who are friends of Jo's went to an Open Door Society conference and Jo says, "I guess there was a point where some woman who they really liked a lot made everyone chant 'forget college, forget college. Do not say the word college, I will not say the word college.' I thought, God I wish I'd heard that woman a couple of years ago!" Nancy Ann wasn't pressured about college, probably because Josephine and Fred didn't have those achievement expectations. Atherton is "working real hard . . . professionally to help increase the degree of parenting skills that children acquire as they go through school and through life," so they know how to be parents.

While the cores of stories by parents of the younger adoptees are like birth stories, the cores of stories by parents of adoptees being launched are more about themselves as parents and the adoptive parenting experience. Rather than "rejecting difference," or "accepting difference" (Kirk, 1964, pp. 98-99) they seem to be exploring the notion that adoptive parenthood has not quite worked out as they anticipated. Josephine, speaking about Nancy Ann's divorce, says "that's been sad. But I think that . . . you experience those type of things no matter . . . whether you're adopted or whatever. You hurt for your children when they hurt." Atherton says they wanted a "normal" family; there's a little part of Bill that's sad because he and Tami didn't have biological children and he doesn't know what that would have been like; Stan, too, is sad because Victoria didn't have him and Millie "right at the beginning." Something was different and these parents are trying to figure out what it was.

Adoption Does Make a Difference

Expectations are woven into these adoptive parents' stories. Jo and Jean Pierre come right out and say, "There's been a lot of pain" in their home "And the pain isn't so much the adoption; it's the adoption including disability." They have been coming to

grips with the fact that adoptive parenthood carried unanticipated burdens, perhaps especially the adoption of an older child. Recently, they learned that some of Ana's contemporaries, older adoptees that Jo and Jean Pierre had a hand in bringing to the U.S. from Latin America, have also had stressful lives. One young man committed suicide, several young women who Jo and Jean Pierre say were "ditched emotionally" in their adoptive families have had pregnancies outside marriage and are living on their own; there have been divorces among these adoptive parents and one of the adoptions disrupted. Jo says, "I'm so angry how disposable, dispensable adoptees seem to be, even to these people. They can just cast off these kids. These parents checked out, they checked out on taking care of these children. They were tough kids, I don't doubt it. All adolescents are tough kids." Then she says, "I don't believe that those same people would have checked out on their adolescents if they had been birth kids." "This has not been a good year for me and it's made me relish . . . how close we still feel to Ana. Because there's days when it hurts and you think Jesus, are we doing it right, she's not connected, maybe she's not bonded. . . . And then I think . . . we are so much further along than those kids. The idea of stopping and checking out, as angry as we have ever gotten, that has never, never crossed our minds for a second." When her mother asked if she would do it again, however, Jo told her she wasn't sure.

Jo's openness allows the echoes from Marie and Gail to be heard. Gail: "I think it took till [Ayeesha] was a teenager for me to understand how difficult it was for her." "For years I kept thinking, God is this a mistake? What have I done to this kid?" Marie talks about Ivan when he was little and says they felt like they weren't doing it "right." "And then when Roann came along she was so normal. It was such a pleasure to have a normal infant around the house and to also realize that we hadn't really done anything wrong. You know, that it was not us, it was a problem that he brought to us." Later Atherton says, "I remember when we first talked about having a family and even when we knew we couldn't have our own kids, we thought we'd have a big family. And

I think we would have if it hadn't been for Ivan, but when you raise a special needs child it just skews everything. And . . . it certainly skews the way we look at adoption." "We knew professionally that we were going to deal with all kinds of children all our lives. And we just wanted to have a family that was normal and raise our own kids. But that is not what happened. So I guess I think [adoption is] bittersweet. Because we have given our lives to children. Many, many, many children. Over the course of thirty-five years. And within our own family the experiences were bittersweet."

Stan is bemused. "Like Victoria . . . is beautiful, okay. Physically fit, and she comes from a nice home, she has money and . . . cars and everything. Why is she giving us so much trouble sometimes?" "I used to always lay blame on kids out in the street because they had bad parents . . . [now] I don't know what the answer is." Bill says he was surprised to learn that another adoptive couple he and Tami knew had assumed they were sort of a model family "like the Waltons . . . unless people happen to be walking by and hear you screaming profanity, or you have police calls . . . nobody knows. And so the image is . . . that [adoption is] without its tumbles and I think that if the truth be known, most of it is with tumbles." Tami expresses the uncertainties she and Bill have about adoptive parenthood by saying, "There's so much that's happened and that we've been through . . . ." "A few times we were . . . asked to go to some training sessions for social workers, to be on a panel of adoptive parents, so they could ask us questions and we'd tell our story. And we used those as an opportunity to make some suggestions to the social workers. . . . but I always left there feeling like I hope they got the gist of it, because we'd say little bits and pieces and is it . . . is it really the right overall picture or did we pick out the wrong things." Bill: "Or emphasize too much the negative. . . and not really talk about the joy of it." He says that for them adoptive parenting has been like a wild ride on a roller coaster.

These parents whose adoptees are being launched are struggling with what it has meant to be parents. Like the first group of couples they are thinking about adoption

from their own point of view. None of them mentions the issues adoptees may face in trying to establish an identity or acknowledges the birth family as a significant factor in that process. Even though Millie and Stan and Tami and Bill know the birth families of Victoria and Susan, they don't seem to think of them in terms of the girls' biological heritage. Jean Pierre says he thinks that Ana and Eduardo have a physical resemblance to him and Jo and that he is much less likely to think of them as adopted than the bi-racial adoptees from his first marriage who look quite different. Josephine points out that Nancy Ann "has our mannerisms and . . . our coloring. She's tall, but she has our coloring and she does things, I notice, that her Father does and different things that I do." To Josephine and Fred, this affirms that Nancy Ann is their daughter and not someone else's.

To whatever extent these couples regard adoptive parenthood as different from biological parenthood, it seems that they link the issues more to disabilities and/or unmet expectations than to the intrinsic nature of adoption. When a couple "decides to adopt a child, they hope that this option will serve them better than the alternative of remaining childless or limiting the size of their family" (Rosenberg, p.87). It would be awkward to complain about it after the fact! And, to their credit, the couples give no hint of thinking their adoptee is a "bad seed." They're more likely to question their own parenting skills. By and large, however, they have "cut off the past" by acting as if it was non-existent. They do not acknowledge "the salience of adoption" to their situation (Hartman and Laird, 1990, pp. 228-229).

The couples with young adoptees talked as if their families were not going to be much different from biological families. The couples who are launching could talk the same way. After all, biological families experience physical and mental disabilities and must cope with offspring who disappoint them in various ways. These couples, however, do not say that adoptive families are like biological families. None of them is interested in adoption reform either. They have not come to the conclusion that

unsealed records and/or open adoption could have been positive influences on family life. This is particularly true for Josephine and Fred and Marie and Atherton who adopted babies; they are concerned about privacy for birth mothers or for adoptees. Stan wonders if things would have been different if Victoria had been with them "right from the beginning." They have found that contact with her birth family upsets Victoria, even though she seeks it. It is only Gail and George who really seem to appreciate the pain and loss of birth parents and the value to adoptees of knowing the truth about their relinquishment. All of these parents have clarified the facts of their family formation with their children, but they seem not to have shared the emotional pieces. Jo, however, suspects that although foreign adoption makes search and reunion unlikely, "If there's a wound, we have got to heal our children and, and adoption could be . . . a wound to a child."

Summary: Acknowledging Two Families in Adoption

To summarize the previous discussion, it can be said that the adopting couples with young children did not share much information about their infertility, although they did speak about it more openly than the launching couples. They seem to have wanted babies, showed no gender preference when adopting, but did prefer to avoid children who had been in the foster care system in the United States. At the time of the interview, they did not believe that being an adoptive family was very much different from being a biological family or that their future with teenage adoptees would be much different from biological families. As far as adoption information is concerned, they have a limited understanding of open adoption and seem to believe that such an arrangement would bring the birth family into closer than comfortable contact. Although they think adoptees may need information about themselves and support the notion of search and reunion, they tend to think that their own children probably will

not be able to search. Overall, they were not especially eager to acknowledge the significance of the birth family or very able to put themselves into their adopted children's shoes.

It seemed as if the launching couples came to adoption more spontaneously than the couples whose families were forming, although the context of the time period in which their children came home probably contributed to that. They were much less concerned about agencies and made more humanitarian comments about the value they assigned to providing a home for a child. They also seem to have been surprised by the intensity of the issues their children brought to the family, even when their pre-adoption history was known. The parents were not bragging about their children's achievements, nor did they provide much information about the way in which their adoptees left home. They know search and reunion can happen to them. They speak about unsealed records and open adoption from the perspective of their own family experience. There has been one reunion among the adoptees and one search begun; one adoptee has always had some contact with her birth family. These parents do not say that adoptive families are the same as biological families. Instead they emphasize issues of parenting and the quality of their relationships with their children. They do not put themselves in the adoptees' place, however; they do not wonder what it must be like to establish an identity when important pieces are missing. In other words, they also do not acknowledge that the birth family is particularly significant.

Parent-child relationships in our culture are based on the English common law notion that children belong to their parents. "Parents may 'give their children away' but may also deprive children of the right to know their families of origin. In another value and legal system, it might be possible to take the position that a mother cannot deprive her child of the right to know about her own mother. This, of course, is the issue around which the search movement and open adoption revolve" (Hartmann and Laird, 1990, p. 221). When all the couples in this study are considered, neither the adoptive

families which were forming nor the adoptive families which were launching seem to communicate about the importance of heredity and what it is like to be part of the adoption triad, having two families. In other words, they do not seem to be communicating about the essential meaning of adoption. They are constrained by their cultural understanding of parenthood.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS ON REFLEXIVE RESEARCH

> "There have not been large surveys of adoptive parents or significant efforts to study their ongoing adjustment as there have been for birth parents and for adoptees. The lack of this attention . . . is an interesting issue in itself, suggesting a lack of concern for these participants, perhaps assuming that their needs are most fully met by the arrangement of an adoption " (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 87).

Their needs may be met, but choosing to raise non biological children poses special challenges. And although "Adoptive parents more readily acknowledge their status today than was true formerly, . . . they vary in rejecting, denying, or insisting that their resulting family differs from biological families" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 199). Does telling the story matter?

Telling My Own Story

The reason I chose a narrative methodology for this research was to allow adoptive couples to narrate their story together, perhaps for the first time, and to get a sense of whether their stories about adoption might be different depending on the stage of the family life cycle. This research plan was not hatched parthenogenetically! As an adoptive parent, I personally was never quite able to reconcile my experience with the notion that this was the same as biological parenting. When my children were young and I mentioned one thing or another, listeners always said that "the same thing could happen" with biological children. Unfortunately, this fed directly into beliefs like, "I must not be doing it right" and "what am I doing to them?" If things were exactly the same, as everyone assured me, why did I feel like it wasn't quite the same?

In fact I adopted Caucasian babies who came home through a private agency when they were only three weeks old. I was not devastated by infertility. There were

any number of adoptees in my family; my cousin has adopted two children and then had two biological children, another cousin adopted two children from Mexico; my aunt's two biological children were adopted by her second husband; my husband's uncle adopted three children. I wanted my children to look as much like me as possible and I assumed that a good home and loving parents were all that was necessary. Like the couples I interviewed whose families were forming, I did not anticipate any difficulty. And like the couples who were launching, I found it. I crashed headlong into my own expectations and weaknesses and generally I am not any more forthcoming on such subjects than these couples were. I certainly did not understand that communicating about the birth family was important, that grief and loss were issues for all members of the adoption triad or that my children might have fears and fantasies they did not share with me.

In terms of reflexive research, the question is: how am I telling my own story through hearing and shaping other stories? Clearly, the entire research process has permitted me to tell mine. My story outline is very similar to that of other adoptive parents. The twelve open-ended interview questions, however, reflect the change in my own thinking over time. The first part of the interview is family oriented and then the questions begin to pull toward speculation about how changes in adoption laws would affect families. In that sense, my interview may have shaped these other stories, but not overtly. Unsealed records or open adoption, I see now, would have made a great difference in my parenting because all the information would have been available, there would have been no secrets, communication about adoption would have been facilitated I think. I don't believe I suggested any of that to those couples, but I did want to find out if their ideas about adoption had changed and whether they were the same or different from mine?

I was struck by the similarities. I heard and recognized pieces of my own story in those they were telling. The couples with young children have some strong feelings

that adoptive parenting mirrors biological parenting, just like I did. The launching couples are dealing with many of the issues I am. It is quite likely, however, that my outlook has been modified because I plunged into adoption as a subject for academic study. I learned the literature, the controversies and the questions. That has been validating and provided me with a context for understanding my own subjective experience. I wish I had known that educational underachievement was so common among adoptees. I felt very close to Jo and Jean Pierre when they spoke about having to let go of their hopes for Ana. And how complicated it is for adoptees to find themselves in families which offer so much after being born into families that could offer nothing. Now my story about adoption is a story about how I didn't really understand the meaning of adoption. It is not the story I heard in the interviews.

Answering the Research Questions

Initially, it seemed as if all the interviews were so different and there was such a profusion of information that it would be impossible to learn anything. I am glad I had enough faith in the qualitative research process to carry me forward despite never having dealt with such a mountain of material. In retrospect I think the two most important things I did were to absorb myself completely in the detail of the data and to keep track of the process from beginning to end. In particular, I kept a notecard file on all the couples I contacted, whether or not they participated. Each card included the names of parents and children, pseudonyms they chose, address, phone number, dates of all contacts and of mailings, directions to their home, comments they made on the phone and so forth. This file was invaluable because it was so manageable. I could easily put my hands on basic information about the couple and I used it extensively in figuring out how much work I had done. I could also shuffle the cards into various groupings to look at the couples from different angles.

The most important aspect of working with tape recorded interviews was transcribing them in complete detail right from the beginning. I iistened to every audio tape and corrected the transcribed copy so that the written interview reflected the meeting I had had with each couple as faithfully as possible. The hours I spent listening to the tapes meant that I became very familiar with the couples and what they said; I was further immersed when I reduced the transcriptions to profile narratives. Only then did I write the vignettes. The result was that I had many, many interactions with the stories. I would never recommend short cutting this process. It was the only way I could get a grip on the vast amount of material confronting me.

The writing process itself allowed meaning to emerge from the narratives. Familiarity with the adoption literature meant I knew what some of the major issues were and as I worked with them, I began to come upon themes. The research questions were answered as a result of that process. I had almost forgotten about them until I realized that the launching parents did not talk about adoptive families being the same as biological families. The answer to the first question then developed.

With regard to what distinguishes the experience of the two sets of couples, my narrative analysis indicates that parents in newly formed adoptive families, where the adoptees are so young, find it easy to focus on the family's similarity to biological families. They more or less dismiss the difference, adoption, as not being very important. The parents do not anticipate that this will change. The launching couples' experiences are distinguished by the fact that they have faced significant parenting challenges which they also did not anticipate. They do not say that their family is similar to a biological family, instead as the young people are leaving, their parents are assessing the relationship ties that bind them. None of the parents directly acknowledges the "salience" of adoption, that is, that their children hold membership in two families or that this may have meaning for them.

With regard to the parenting challenges mentioned above, it should be noted here that the adoption literature clearly indicates adoptees as being "at increased risk for psychological and academic problems in comparison to their non-adopted counterparts" (Brodzinsky, 1990, p. 23). This is not to say that all adoptees will experience such difficulties. Many are well adjusted and cope successfully. Nonetheless, the myth of the adoption solution which addresses the problems of birthparents (unwanted children), adoptees (homelessness and insecurity) and adoptive parents (childlessness) fails to consider the stresses which accompany the solution. The work of Brodzinsky (1990, p. 6) is based on the "assumption that adoption involves loss, which, in turn, creates stress for the child and thereby increases her or his vulnerability for emotional or behavioral problems." Loss is considered just as significant for adoptees placed in infancy as it is for those placed later, although it may be experienced less traumatically.

The second research question was concerned with whether or not the narratives provided any insight regarding adoptive parents' willingness to support change in adoption practice or legislation. There are several interesting strands of information that emerged here. First is the fact that open adoption was not well understood and the parents tended to think of it as being intrusive. This is not surprising since the concept is fairly new and the research sparse. Then there is the matter of adoptee search. On the one hand, parents indicated they would support a search for the birth family if that was what their children wanted, while on the other hand they tended to minimize the likelihood of such a search. The third strand involves legislation. The couples talked about open records and search almost interchangeably, without specific mention that legislative change will be necessary to unseal adoption records. Search is made considerably more difficult than necessary because the courts seal adoptees' original birth records and are not easily persuaded to release them. Thus, without political activism, unsealing the records seems highly unlikely.

An indicator of the concerns about the "lifelong implications of adoption" is the fact that the Child Welfare League of America, in 1987, "urged" agencies to "advise" new clients that confidentiality in adoption was not guaranteed and "to assist 'within relevant statutes,' all adult triad members in existing adoptions who wish to establish contact with one another" (Gediman and Brown, 1989, p.250). Unfortunately, the law makes it almost impossible to obtain information because the "relevant statutes" cover such a broad range and because judges have been unwilling to compromise birth parents' rights to privacy in favor of adoptees "good cause" for opening the records. Open records cannot force any one to meet someone else against their will; it will only remove the legal barriers to such a meeting. "Many people know exactly who the birth mother is: adoption agencies, baby brokers, the courts . . . . Many people have full access to these records, but the individual to whom the records rightfully belong does not" (Brodzinsky, et al, 1992, p.187). Given that "the best interest of the child" is the centerpiece of our adoption legislation, it is quite odd that sealed records are "defended in terms of the best interest of the two sets of parents" (p.187).

Acknowledging two families in adoption would allow the adoptees' interests to take priority. The legal system, however, is slow to change. It will require the politicization of all members of the adoption triad and that will require deep change in their value systems. At the time I interviewed them, the adoptive couples were not interested in becoming involved in adoption reform. Their own professional development or other political issues would take precedence if they had the time for such activities. Several said, "No more meetings." The couples had become parents by virtue of adoption, they regarded legal inconsistencies from state to state and lack of tax credits as definite problems, but conveyed no strong sense that traditional closed adoption ought to be changed. The fact that the couples were interviewed together may have contributed to their presentation of this viewpoint. The system had worked for them. Why change it?

Conjoint Interviews and Stability Narratives

Like some of the adoptive mothers in the research, I was the lead partner in the adoption process. My husband, like some of their husbands, was more committed to the "adoption is just the same" theme. In planning the research, my thinking was that conjoint interviews would provide a richer narrative because two people were contributing to it. (Note: it was almost always the wives who made the arrangements when I phoned, despite my meticulous care in speaking with whichever partner answered the call). The narratives are certainly full and rich, but there is a restrained quality about them. In part, I believe this is because they were conjoint interviews. These stories seem to be stability narratives.

There is scarcely a hint of disagreement between the couples about anything. For example, Frank and Stephanie speak of the way she vigilantly watches out for trouble while he denies that trouble is likely. They do this in a very evenhanded fashion. And Jo was obviously surprised when Jean Pierre suggested that Ana and Eduardo look like them, but she did not contradict him. The couples tended not to question each other's interpretations. Instead, there was this quality of a story being told that was implicitly agreeable to both; differences might be mentioned, but the parameters of disagreement were not likely to be exposed. The stories also were full of detail about the couple as hard working parents and the personal growth parenthood has brought them.

I think the stories are stability narratives because the couples present themselves in a dependable, reliable way. Such characteristics are valued both in society and in relationships (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). Tami and Bill were the only couple to negotiate a difference of opinion during the interview. When the subject of unsealed records and open adoption came up, they had an extensive discussion during which Tami asked Bill if he knew what open adoption was; while Bill insisted that it was right to unseal records no matter what the consequences, Tami was equally insistent

about the protective nature of sealed records which safeguarded Susan from her abusive foster family. If Susan had not already had a reunion, their discussion might have been quite different.

Perhaps the process of adoption taught these couples to speak with care. Bill and Rose recalled that their first agency interviewed them together briefly and then separately. Rose: "And I remember the question, the question that sticks in my mind that made me feel very anxious about this whole thing is, 'How would you rate your marriage on a scale of 1 to 10?' And I remember thinking, what if I answer differently than Bill? What if I say it's a ten and he says it's a six? What if I say it's a six and he says it's a nine? And if I say something different than Bill, she's going to think there is something wrong with us. And the whole thing set us up like that, I mean the whole thing." If I had interviewed the couples separately, I might have set up a similar dynamic unintentionally, although nothing particular was at stake in the interview.

For me, personally, what is always at stake is the public perception of my parenting and my family. That may be protected more by a conjoint interview since the couples chose to avoid "hot" topics and behaviors. It may also depend on the couple. Some people don't care about public perceptions, but I have a hard time believing that adoptive parents aren't sensitive to them. As noted previously, it was much easier to find couples with young adoptees to interview. I had slight acquaintance with three couples and the other three came from referrals. Only one hesitated to get involved. The couples who were launching were different. I had a connection with two of them, four were referrals and there were four other couples who declined to participate. Why should it have been easier to find the first set? My guess is that I secured their cooperation because the families are young, the children are young and everything is going smoothly. They are enthusiastic. However, if the launching couples are any indicator, family life with older adoptees is much bumpier! (That has been my experience too). So discussing it with a stranger is not necessarily appealing.

On the other hand, adoption may not seem very significant once the children are gone. Why bother? One couple said, "It's not a way we want to spend our time and besides, everything is okay." Whether there was ever a period when things weren't okay, I don't know. Two other couples were concerned about privacy which I can only assume means they are a bit uncomfortable with public adoption disclosures. Given the secrecy promised by traditional adoption, that is not surprising.

Future Research with Adoptive Parents

I suspect it was the quasi-public nature of being interviewed for a doctoral dissertation that prompted some couples to forget what the research was about. At the checkback, any number of them wanted to be reminded of just what I was doing. Margaret was curious about what other couples had said and wondered how she would have responded to different questions or under other circumstances. If I had mailed the profile narrative out to be read in advance of the checkback, would the couples have responded differently? Maybe some would have been more disclosive. Participating in someone's research isn't necessarily as rewarding for the subjects as it is for the researcher, although "my interest in [their] experience, my attending to what they say, and my honoring their words when I present their experience to a larger public" (Seidman, 1991, p. 83) is a measure that I have taken them seriously. Gail did tell me that I was the first person she had ever met who understood what she meant about not "recognizing" her child genetically. The small gift I gave each couple was a token of my thanks and appreciation. I heard Atherton remark to Marie, "Thoughtful."

There are a number of considerations for future research. Although I am not surprised by how little these couples know about adoption reform efforts, it seems as if social workers ought to be educating adoptive parents more extensively. On the other hand, perhaps prospective adopters cannot hear or remember all the cautions, advice

and wisdom very well. Groups for adoptive parents are usually available in agencies, yet once the adoption is finalized the impetus for involvement in them is easily lost. Open Door Society meetings are attended by the parents of young children for the most part. The couples I interviewed either didn't have time for such meetings or had other priorities.

If I were designing a follow-up project, I would ask the couples to read each other's profile narratives. After the launching couples had read the narratives of the younger families and vice versa, I would interview them again. This could provide some ideological cross pollination, giving the couples a window on other experiences without the confusion of direct contact. With their permission, the profile narratives might also be used to start a research project with a different set of couples. Another possibility is that agencies could do their own follow up research with adoptive parents from their client lists using a group format to explore ways of handling the developmental tasks of various stages in the adoptive family life cycle (Rosenberg, 1992). This would encourage parents to be thinking ahead or reflecting back and provoke their speculation about the significance of adoption across the life span. Jo said that for her the issues of adoption are parenting issues and that her children just stopped being adoptees. My question is why? I haven't heard that adoptees ever stop thinking they were adopted, even though their desire to deal with it is more or less intense at various times across their lives. Adoptive parents, therefore, cannot just form a family and then forget about it. If adoptive parents heard a message focused on the importance of confronting and communicating about the "differentness" of being an adoptive family, it might go a long way toward preparing them for the challenges they are likely to face.

The power and the pain of adoptive parents is such that helping professionals, apparently, are treating them with kid gloves. Infertility can certainly be painful, accompanied as it is often by grief and loss. That should not be minimized, but it is not

a life threatening health problem either. The fact that the medical and insurance industries promote/support high-tech treatment of infertility, thus discouraging the nurturance of children in need, is indicative of the premium society places on biological parenthood (Bartholet, 1993). However, today's society is also faced with the necessity for adjusting to diversity in family formation; aside from adoptive families, there are gay/lesbian families, single parent families, foster families and blended families as well as families formed by virtue of scientific fertility measures. They are not the same as the biological family. "Parenting and bonds of attachment are not limited to primary biological relationships" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 204). Adoption means choosing to parent, that is raise and nurture, a non biological child. There is a difference between a nurturing relationship with a child and a biological relationship.

Research data from projects like this one can be used in a variety of ways: to further the understanding of adoption professionals like lawyers, for example, who participate in the formation of adoptive families and to help train educators and clinicians who work with adoptive families. Psychoeducational workshops featuring presentations by the adoption triad members would broaden the perspectives of all these professionals. Discussion groups followed by reflecting teams might be a viable method, particularly now that continuing education units are required for maintaining professional licensure. Such panels could also be useful with adoptive families to strengthen empathy between them and, with other triad members and to prepare them for the parenting challenges that can be expected. There is an isolation to adoptive parenting that cries out for change. If adoptive parents had interaction with parents of other so-called alternative families, they could begin to understand themselves as parents in a different kind of family instead of as substitute parents. This would go a long way toward loosening the cultural preference for biological families. It might also help adoptive parents shift their understanding from their own need to parent to an understanding of the adoptee's needs.

Adoptive parents are active in lobbying to protect their interests when it comes to forming a family. The couples I interviewed were eager to have greater uniformity in adoption laws and more tax supports for adoption. There has been recent legislative movement in these directions, so adoptive parents do have political clout. "We know many legislators at the local, state, and national levels who are adoptive parents . . . " (Brodzinsky, 1992, p. 188). They are working to protect adoptive families and insure that permanent homes for children are available. Agencies, educators and professional helpers ought also to encourage an equal commitment to the rights of adoptees to have full access to information about themselves.

Evaluating the Narratives of Adoptive Parents

I suspect that the parents I interviewed had not told their story together, that it really was a first or that they may only have told pieces of it. Some even said this. Earlier, I suggested that these were stability narratives, but perhaps they were simply constricted. Seidman (1991) believes that a three interview model of 90 minute meetings spaced out over several weeks is ideal for establishing a context within which participants can make meaning of their experience. The single interview I conducted closed by questioning the couples about the interview itself. At this time, the couples tended to comment on their experience as parents while ignoring the modifying word adoptive. The biological model of the family is well entrenched.

Even the titles of their narratives are revealing. Three couples included the word adoption. Michael and Elaine focused on the process of obtaining a child; Frank and Stephanie and Tami and Bill refer to the meaning they attach to being adoptive parents, i.e. it's "different" and "it's up and down." A number of the other couples use words like positive, optimism, real, fate, and happy. These words hint at worries about adoption. For example, Charlie and Marie in "A Positive Way to Form a Family"

talked about some of the concerns they had prior to adopting; Fred and Stella are "optimistic" about it; Bill and Rose have a "real" family with a child who looks like them. Ken and Margaret are lucky, it was "fate" that brought them a baby; Josephine and Fred look back and say they are a "happy" family. Adoption makes for good, real, happy families. But what if there are problems? Are the families still good, real and happy? Millie and Stan say "She Still Needs Us," almost as if they might be discarded. Marie and Atherton found it bittersweet; Gail and George started again and have a second family; Jo and Jean Pierre are immersed in special needs.

If the narratives are constricted, the reason may be the cultural constraints placed on the narrators. Our cultural emphasis on the biological family as the preferred model cannot help but have effects on what people say and how they say it. Those who choose to raise non biological children face challenges and if they are unprepared because of cultural collusion in the myth of "sameness, " should we be surprised? The couples I interviewed were at different points in their story about adoption. Some, like Bill and Rose, Michael and Elaine and Josephine and Fred held to the customary understanding of adoption as a substitute for biological parenthood. Others had been affected by events that called their parenting into question and thus experienced personal transformation in their understanding of what it means to be parents. In that sense it can be said that their narratives have been "liberated by critical insight," as Jo and Tami and Marie were when they learned the power of standing back to observe themselves (Rosenwald, 1992, p. 275). I refuse to argue, however, that some of the narratives are better or more valid than others (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992), largely because I believe they were all constrained in one way or another by the cultural preference for biological children. Bill acknowledged there was a conflict when he remarked that having biological children would have meant not having Susan.

The criteria for evaluating qualitative research like this requires the use of concepts like trustworthiness and its dimensions of persuasiveness, correspondence,

coherence and pragmatic usage (Riessman, 1993). Readers judge whether these criteria apply to the material. For example, "Persuasiveness ultimately rests on the rhetoric of writing . . . " (p. 66). I have made the views espoused by the narrators clear, I think, by weaving a text of thematic patterns. In conjoint interviews, twelve couples told twelve stories about being parents by adoption. The couples with young adoptees told stories full of hope for a family future that would not be much different than it would be if they had biological children. The launching couples told stories about the realities of their struggles with adoptive parenting. I drew conclusions (Seidman, 1993, p. 66) "by interviewing a number of participants, . . . connect[ing] their experiences and check[ing] the comments of one participant against those of others." Then, for correspondence, there was a member checkback and participants saw and commented on their profile narratives; correspondence, however, is not necessarily affirming. My interpretations are my responsibility (Riessman, 1993).

"Global coherence refers to the overall goals a narrator is trying to accomplish by speaking." I have argued that the couples may have had global, that is "strategic -- impression management" goals and that there are recurring themes among the narratives, but the "coherence criterion" is not easy to apply, especially to "interaction in interviews" (p. 67). If nothing else, I have tried to make it possible for readers to decide on the trustworthiness by making a transcription and profile narrative available and by specifying my process and my thinking in detail. My biases in favor of greater communication about adoption in families and against adoption being treated as a substitute for biological parenting are clear. The reader's constructions are invited.

Epilogue

All twelve couples were sent a Request for Feedback (Appendix H) inviting their comments on the discussion sections of the dissertation. Only three were returned and two of them were quite similar. They expressed surprise at the "change in tenor" between the expectations of the forming families and those of the launching families. These respondents also remarked on their increased awareness of the isolation often experienced by adoptive families. This was something they had not had a chance to talk about, although the transcriptions revealed that both couples had alluded to it in their interviews. The third respondent was dismayed by the apparent lack of education about issues of loss among the couples.

APPENDIX A

THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me the story of how you came to be adoptive parents. What was going on? What did you do?

2. What kind of history is there of adoption in both your families? How did family and friends respond to your becoming an adoptive family?

3. What was it like when (the adoptee) came home? How old was s/he? What happened? How did you feel?

4. What sorts of experiences have you had as adoptive parents that surprised you? That you were unprepared for? That you believe you handled especially well?

5. (a) What do you imagine it will be like having older adoptive children? teenagers and young adults, for example?

(b) How did you describe your adoptive family when the children were much younger as compared to the way you describe it now that they are young adults?

6. How do you think others view your family? That is, would they think of it as being the same or different from other families? Are there other adoptive parents in your circle of friends or that you socialize with?

7. Are you satisfied with the way current adoption laws affect your family? How could they be changed?

8. What do you think about adoptees and birthparents searching for and finding each other? And about unsealing the adoption records? How would that affect your family?

9. How do you feel about open adoption, where the birthparents remain in contact after placement? How do you think that would have affected your family?

10. Looking back over our conversation today, what sense do you make of it? What stands out in your mind or how would you summarize it?

11. If you could paint a picture or sing a song or write a story about adoption, what would it be? Have there been changes in it over time? Is your story about adoption now different than it used to be?

12. How do you feel about adoption reform? What stops you from getting involved in adoption reform?

APPENDIX B

FIRST LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear

I'm writing to follow-up on my phone call to your home on (day, date). As you may recall, we discussed the possibility that you might be willing to help me out on the research for my doctoral dissertation. Specifically, I plan to conduct conjoint interviews with adoptive parents in order to hear (a) their stories about this way of forming a family and (b) their thoughts about change in adoption law and practice. My sense of our phone conversation was that an interview would certainly be a possibility.

Attached you will find copies of the voluntary consent and background data forms which I have enclosed to give you an impression of my dissertation. I am a student in family therapy at the University of Massachusetts School of Education where Dr. Janine M. Roberts is my Advisor. In addition, I too am an adoptive parent, so our meeting together would have common ground. I look forward to meeting you and will be in touch sometime next week

Sincerely yours,

APPENDIX C
PERSONAL DATA FORM

Name: _____

Local address: _____

1. Briefly outline when and where you were born, where you grew up and your parents' religious/ethnic/racial background.

2. How much formal education have you had?

3. Briefly describe the work you do.

4. What is the history of adoption in your extended family? For example, have relatives been adoptees or birth parents?

APPENDIX D

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

Study of Parents by Adoption
Focused on Their Experience Forming an Adoptive Family
and Their Thoughts about Change in Adoption Law and Practice

Consent for Voluntary Participation

I volunteer to participate in this qualitative study and understand that:

1. I will be interviewed by Suzanne J. McGowan using a guided interview format consisting of twelve questions.
2. The questions I will respond to address my views on adoption as a means of family formation and on adoption law and practice. I understand that the purpose of this research is to learn about adoptive parent attitudes toward adoption reform.
3. The interview will be tape recorded to facilitate analysis of the data.
4. My name and those of my family members will not be used, nor will we be identified personally in any way or at any time. I understand it will be necessary to identify participants in the dissertation by gender and position in the family, (e.g. Father said . . . or eldest adopted daughter said . . .).
5. I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.
6. I have the right to review material prior to the final oral exam or other publication; the research design includes a checkback for my review of the interview profile.
7. I understand that information from this interview will be included in Suzanne J. McGowan's doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.
8. I am free to participate or not to participate without prejudice.
9. Because of the small number of participants, approximately twelve couples, I understand there is some risk that I may be identified as a participant in this study.

_____ _____

Researcher signature date

_____ _____

Participant signature date

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLIE AND MARIE

Interviewer: I certainly appreciate your willingness to do this and for giving me your time. Um, it's really nice. I guess the way I'd like to start is um, if you'd be willing to tell me the story of how you came to be adoptive parents. Um, and what was going on and what did you do.

Marie: Do you want me to start?

Charlie: You can go ahead if you'd like.

Marie: Well, we wanted to have children. We tried to have them starting in 1982 and um, we went through a long period of infertility treatment, I had ruptured an appendix when I was a child and so that caused a lot of problems. And uh, it became clear um, about probably five years into the, the fertility stuff that it probably wasn't going to work and so we started exploring adoption. And we went to, I went to some of the agencies in the [city] area and tried to see if there were, if there was one that kind of fit our needs. And I visited a few of them among which were [one] which is a really big organization and kinda regimental in the way it deals with people, but they certainly have placed a lot of children and I visited [another] which is the group that we eventually worked with there [where we were living]. And they are smaller and much more willing to work with people on an individual basis. Um, so we...starting applying to them in 1988, I remember it was March of 1988 because I had an operation for...um, some scarring, some abdominal scarring in October of '87 and we thought we'd give that a few months to see if that worked and it didn't. So we applied in March of '88 and then because of...problems in India...um, governmental problems, really dealing with the

orphanages...and um, oh, the government was really cracking down on things and they, they ended up closing the orphanage that we had applied to, International Mission of Hope in Calcutta.

Charlie: When its licensing came up, it didn't get reviewed right away.

Interviewer: How did you happen to choose India?

Marie: Charlie had worked with some Indian fellows, in his Ph.D. program and also [at his job] and we decided that um...

Charlie: I think we had choices like Korea, India, various South American countries.

Marie: Right.

Charlie: Um, and you were looking for a way, I guess there were some administrative differences and cost differences. But in the end it was, we had to find some other reason...to choose.

Marie: I think we decided not to go, you know, domestic adoption because it took a long time.

Charlie: Oh that's right.

Marie: Either...we would have to come up with a lot of money, we did anyway have to come up with a lot of money, but it was even more for a domestic adoption and...

Interviewer: Oh really.

Marie: it seemed very...sorta precarious in the way it worked, whereas overseas adoptions it seemed like if you did all the paperwork and you had the right fee eventually you would get a child.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Some of the American programs that I looked at, either they were involving things like advertising in the other states and taking a chance of birth mothers changing their minds or...things like, um, birth mothers who didn't get health insurance and you know, and exposing ourselves to having to pay some kind of astronomical health bill and we just...knew we had a certain limited amount of funds and energy to do this and so I had heard very good things about this...program in India. In fact, I talked to...a woman out in [another state] who has adopted four Indian children and she told me very good things about the program and it just seemed like the right...thing but as I said, right after we launched ourselves on this, things started to close down and we, um, got all of our papers in and had our home study done and everything and then the orphanage was actually closed to international adoption for about a year.

Interviewer: Huh.

Marie: So, um...what we didn't know was...just after we submitted our papers Michael was born (pause) so it took...fifteen months for him to come home. And we didn't know he was...alive for most of that time.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: They didn't, they didn't tell us about him.

Marie: Right, which was good. Then we would have been a nervous wreck.

Charlie: They knew there would be a big delay. So they weren't relicensed and, uh, in general it was thought they would be relicensed it was just a question of how long it would take. India is a very bureaucratic country.

Interviewer: Right.

Charlie: So it doesn't move very quickly at all. Once they decide to do it a certain way...it takes a while to work that out.

Interviewer: Uh huh. So then did Tina come from the same agency?

Marie: Yes she did.

Interviewer: The same orphanage I mean.

Charlie: Yeah.

Marie: Yeah, she ah, we decided that, well it took us a while to get around to adopting a second time because of financial...

Interviewer: Of course.

Marie: aspect and also we had moved from [city] to [city] and so we were dealing with having a house for the first time and having Michael and sort of getting reoriented...to being a family. And um, so when we finally decided to adopt a second child we...thought about other agencies because India, again, was closed at the, at the, in the early period that we were interested in adopting. Maybe India wasn't closed, but the particular orphanage that Michael had come from was closed. So...we fiddled around for a long time and again I went back to [agency] to see what they had to offer and they had various programs in India, but I was also again put off by their...bureaucratic...mode of operation. You know, I felt like we have enough to deal with, with India being bureaucratic we don't need a bureaucratic agency here too! (Interviewer laughs.) So, ah, then we finally went back to [agency] and they said that this orphanage had opened up again.

Interviewer: Oh.

Marie: And in fact, we...have a friend who is adopting a baby, she had moved here from [city] about three years ago, I guess, and, um, decided to adopt a child from India, from the same orphanage. And she was progressing very rapidly...

Charlie: The third.

Marie: The third child, right, so we decided, well things look good, if her adoption is going so smoothly then, maybe we better just put our papers in...

Interviewer: The time may be right.

Marie: Yeah, so it was. It was nine months. Um, we applied in June and...

Charlie: She was six when she came, right?

Marie: She was five months.

Charlie: Five months.

Marie: She arrived in April, so it was about nine or ten months from the time we applied until...we got her. So that was really lucky because Michael from the beginning was two and a half years. (Pause) So um, (laughs)

Interviewer: Two and a half years?

Marie: Well it was...

Interviewer: He was fifteen months old when you got him, brought him home.

Marie: Yeah but from the time we started the application process until we actually got a child, it was two and a half years.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Marie: And with her it was shorter. That had to do with...a number of things...the processing was going more smoothly and also we had a home study done already and that just had to be updated and we were familiar with our social worker who is really a great, wonderful person. She, she has twelve adopted children.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh. That's a lot.

Marie: And they are all older. She's been through it a lot and she's a, a very realistic attitude about it. Real practical, and has really been supportive and helpful.

Interviewer: Well, is there any history of adoption in either of your families.

Charlie: Not in mine.

Interviewer: Not in yours?

Charlie: Not in mine.

Marie: Um, my grandfather had been adopted by cousins back in Norway. I think his parents died when he and his sister were children. And so his cousins took them in and he took their name. So that's why my name is [name], his name had been [different] when he was...born. But, you know, that was never an issue. First of all my grandfather died long before I was born and I didn't even really understand that he had been adopted until a long time later. So, I wouldn't say that...I had much of a consciousness of adoption being part of our family, um, nor does my Mother. You know, it's not really an issue except that when you asked the question I was able to dig that up out of the past.

Interviewer: Right.

Marie: Charlie' um, stepmother, who just married into his family about maybe eight or ten years ago, has a lot of adoption in her family.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: But, since that really didn't happen until...

Charlie: I didn't grow up with her.

Marie: He didn't grow up with her, so that doesn't affect his consciousness about adoption really. But it does affect the positive attitude that she has and that other relatives in [city] have about our adopting. Which is really good.

Interviewer: So, so, how would you say then that family and friends have responded to your becoming an adopted family?

Marie: Very well. Oh yeah, really, I'd say no problems at all.

Interviewer: Um huh. So what was it like when ah, when Michael came home? And when Tina came home. And how old were they and what happened and how did you feel and all that kind of stuff?

Marie: It was great. When Michael came home it was just like, um, (pause) really wonderful. I remember just being really excited and...cause it was so new, you know, I am sure this is true of every first time parent.

Charlie: Right.

Marie: Um, we were just thrilled, we watched his every move, you know, we paid attention to him all the time. (Interviewer laughs) We spent tons of time with him which, now I consider, may not have been such a great thing because he's fairly dependent on us for entertainment. Um, but it was really a thrilling time. We got a lot

of support from family members who came and visited. My Mother came to stay for a week.

Interviewer: Oh how nice.

Marie: Our sister, my sisters and brother came and it was, it was very, very good joyful, happy time.

Interviewer: Where do they, where do they, did you have to go say to [city] or [city]?

Charlie: For Michael we lived in [city]. So we went to [name] airport. It was a short drive. We also had to go to [same city] for Tina. So it was a long drive.

Marie: And for Michael...

Interviewer: Were they escorted?

Marie: They were escorted.

Charlie: They had escorts all the way across.

Marie: Michael, it took him, I think, five days to get here from India.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh.

Marie: They stopped in Bangkok and then he stopped in um, Seattle and then he spent a night in Minneapolis and then came [here]. And he was in pretty bad condition when he arrived. He was very thin, very weak, um, he had a lot of developmental delays. We

had gotten, what do you call it? The referral that we had gotten on him, which we received in...May I guess, um, it was fairly scary. It said moderate to sever malnutrition. It listed how big he was and how much he weighed and the fact that he had a problem with wheezing and developmental delays and all this stuff and we just thought, wow, how are we...

Charlie: When they were asking us, when we were filling out forms...what kind of um, problems a child might have that we could deal with, in general we checked off no, no for the severe problems. And when we saw malnutrition we thought, I thought it just meant, well, hadn't been eating well. You know, they hadn't had a good source of food. Um. So we said, well that's fine. And then when we finally got our referral, that's when we found out, they said malnutrition, they explained to us what it meant was...he had been getting enough food, but he wasn't growing as fast as he should. And something else was probably going on, and that's what scared us.

Marie: Yeah.

Charlie: Because of the possibilities of what he might have had... were pretty strange.

Marie: Yeah, they were pretty scary. So, you know, I showed this information to a couple of...American pediatricians in the [city] area and they said, you know, "Stay away from this situation." Um...

Charlie: We had a choice at this point of what to do.

Interviewer: Oh.

Marie: But we had waited so long and you know, we got a picture.

Interviewer: Oh yes, you got a picture of him. Ah huh.

Charlie: We talked to other people too.

Marie: So then I called this woman [I mentioned before], the mother of the four children from this orphanage and she said, "Well, you know, he is smaller than normal for an Indian child but...maybe there is something there that we don't know about and we should find out about it." So, she and another adoptive mother helped me to draft a letter that...elicited more information about him. It took a long time, it took about...five or six weeks to get the information from India, but we finally got a letter explaining, um, and ah... (begins to cry) makes me cry. Excuse me.

Interviewer: That's okay. Uh huh. He was pretty sick huh?

Marie: Yeah, he was really sick. (crying)

Interviewer: You were intensely bonded to him just through a picture.

Marie: Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: It's going to make me cry too.

Marie: (laughs through tears) He had um, (pause) he had a collapsed lung and he had...um,

Interviewer: Oh gosh.

Marie: He was exposed to TB.

Interviewer: Um.

Charlie: So that was, that was in the letter that we found that out? I had forgotten the sequence of events.

Marie: Yeah. That was sort of good. I mean it sounds like bad news, but it was sort of good cause then we said to ourselves, oh, that's why he's so small,

Charlie: Right.

Marie: That's why he's so weak and you know. So then um, we got that information and we told that to [that] woman in [...] who, I don't know if I mentioned she's a pediatrician.

Interviewer: Oh. She's also a pediatrician.

Marie: And she specializes in international adoption.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: So, so we said yes, but then it was still um, (pause) that was in like July, so there was August, September and finally he came October.

Interviewer: Wow. So then you had all this information and he was still there so then you had to spend all that time frightened and worried about how he was progressing.

Marie: Yeah. And they had also switched him to another orphanage because he um, the one he had been at originally was still closed so this other one...

Interviewer: Oh.

Marie: They, they...

Charlie: They had taken all the children who were ready, who they wanted to send to their assignments and moved them from the orphanage that didn't have a license to this other one, as a way of getting them placed. Move them somewhere else.

Marie: Yeah, so anyway, when he finally came he was very bright and, you know, happy and bright-eyed and you could tell he was (pause) okay mentally. But he just had a long way to go physically.

Interviewer: Wow.

Marie: So uh, we had him assessed by an early intervention team and um, (pause) he had physical therapy and you know, various types of therapy for a period of...well, actually he's had it until just now. He's been through three years of preschool but he had (pause) um, therapy in [our former home], we had someone come to the house once a week to help him learn how to do things like, we had to teach him how to crawl, teach him how to get up and sit down. You know, lots of things that are really simple for other children. If he was standing here...

Charlie: Hold his bottle.

Marie: Yeah, we had to teach him how to hold his bottle.

Charlie: They told us right away he should be holding his own bottle. Things like that.

Interviewer: Huh.

Marie: But he couldn't bend over. If he was standing here and there was a toy on the floor, he couldn't...figure out how to get down and get the toy. So we had to work on that a lot. And, (clears throat) there were a lot of other things like that, that we had to work with.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh.

Marie: But ah, so then we moved here and we contacted the [name] program in [city]. And they were very helpful. They are an early intervention um, agency for this rural [...], and area.

Interviewer: I think I have heard of them.

Marie: They're great. They've helped him a lot throughout the time he came to be three years old. And then once he was three he was eligible for [our town] preschool. So he went there and has been there for three years. And now he is going into kindergarten. And, you know, he's gotten such great help from so many people that's he's really, he's ready and he can do just about everything that any other six year old can.

Charlie: He also had a problem with his leg when he was younger. Where his feet were turned out.

Marie: Oh yeah, his feet were turned out and his hips were turned out so he had to wear a brace.

Charlie: It was because he started walking so late. And his toes were...

Marie: They looked in his crib kinda like this. (demonstrates)

Charlie: Yeah, his toes weren't pointing forward the way they should. He had to wear this...device at night time.

Marie: Yeah.

Charlie: To get his feet pointed forward. That lasted...awhile.

Marie: Nine months I think he had to wear that. And then he had to take TB medicine for six months after he arrived. So I'd say his arrival was, um, very exciting and adventurous and, um, you know, just really out of the ordinary. I felt like we were constantly breaking new ground. Talking to pediatric orthopedists and early intervention people and all of these people that I'd never even heard of before.

Interviewer: Right.

Marie: Um.

Interviewer: It sounds like you must have been, correct me if I am wrong, but it sounds like he must have been somewhat at any rate, neglected, in this orphanage.

Marie: Um.

Interviewer: They weren't picking him up or they weren't...holding him or they weren't...

Marie: It's hard to...

Interviewer: Why was he lying there all the time?

Marie: I think he was probably lying there because of...having had the collapsed lung, you know, early on.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, collapsed lung.

Marie: And so he probably wasn't able to be picked up for awhile.

Charlie: He was very sick.

Interviewer: Ah huh.

Marie: And then when he was exposed to TB, you know, he started getting TB medication. I don't know. They say, what I've understood from people who have visited this orphanage, is that they do have a lot of good care for the children. And when Michael was there, I was told there were...two babies for each care giver. Which is a pretty good ratio.

Interviewer: Yes.

Marie: When Tina was there it was just the other way around. There were two care givers for each baby. (laughing) They had a care giver during the day and one at night. So, uh, they must have done the same thing when Michael was there too, except that the, each person had two babies to take care of, during the day and at night.

Interviewer: Um.

Marie: But um, I asked that question of people who had been there and they were pretty...adamant about telling me, no, the children do receive very good care there. I haven't seen it myself so I can't really say, but that's just...what people have told me.

Charlie: And we know other kids coming from there, a lot of other kids.

Marie: Because he is so personable and, you know, responsive um, in a social way...

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And loving, we thought, well, he must have been loved and cared for and played with and all those things. Even though they had a lot of children there. They had two hundred children at the time he was there. And when Tina was there they only had forty children.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: So it was really scaled down a lot. But, um, so, (pause) my feeling is that he, that he did have good care to the extent that they could give it to him, and given his, you know, sickness and everything.

Interviewer: It sounds like it was quite different when she came home.

Marie: When she came it was very different. She was really robust. Um, first of all, she came much sooner than we expected.
int: Uh huh.

Marie: I had uh, signed up to have a part time job ah, starting in April, going through the middle of June. I was going to be teaching and ah, we expected her to come some time during the summer. And lo and behold she came two weeks before I was supposed to start my job so (interviewer laughs) it was sort of a jolt. (laughs) And uh, we, we um, found out about her coming on Thursday and then got a crazy series of phone calls um, over the next thirty-six or forty-eight hours, about when exactly when she was going to come.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Um. She got held up in [city] for awhile...

Charlie: We got late arriving information and conflicting information.

Marie: Yeah, and we couldn't figure out what was going to happen. Finally at midnight on Friday night, ah, we called or someone called us to say that she would be arriving at [name] airport at eight o'clock Saturday morning. So we had, you know, five hours of sleep Friday night, hopped in the car, raced to [name] airport, and there she was. And this lovely couple from [city] brought her. The man was one of the ah, escorts who volunteers to ah, take these children. So he had gone to [city] and met the escort.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And they were going to keep her over night in [city] and then his wife wanted him home for Easter Sunday so she said, "No, you're going today, tonight." And she came with him, so...they brought her and there she was in her little basket, and she came in a little straw basket. And she was as chubby as can be. And um, she looked like...she slept all the way home. (Speaks to Tina: That's Mummy's shoe, thank-you.) And my sister and brother in-law happened to be planning a visit for Easter weekend, so they were here that week-end. Which was good because Michael then had someone to interact with him while we were so excited about our new baby. And she was really feisty and loud and cute and seeming to be very strong and, you know, sure of herself from the very beginning. I remember standing her up on my lap and having her open her mouth and just shriek in delight at being stood up. Just the loudest shriek I've ever heard from a baby. And she has continued to be...

Interviewer: Very active.

Marie: She's loud, opinionated, active, um, just quite different from our first experience.

Interviewer: I have one of those who used to stand on my lap and jump up and down too. They would say to me, he was about three months old, and they would say to me, "Do you know he has muscles?" (everyone laughs) I said, "Yes, I know he has muscles." Up and down, oh yes.

Marie: That's the way she is. She doesn't like to sit still very much. And she also has some developmental delays. And she's been seeing a therapist from the Reach Program. She just learned how to walk about a month ago, which is pretty late.

Interviewer: A little late, ah huh.

Marie: Michael also learned to walk when he was twenty-two months. And we weren't that worried about it, but we were really glad when she finally, you know, figured it out.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: But she's had therapy for fine motor skills as well as gross motor skills.

Interviewer: Wow.

Marie: And she had a real problem with eating for awhile. She couldn't, she didn't want to pick things up and, you know, she just didn't want to be fed. All she would do is drink a bottle for quite a long time.

Interviewer: Huh.

Marie: Now she's more or less, you know, reconciled to...

Interviewer: Interesting.

Marie: eating food from a tray, but....um

Interviewer: Interesting.

Marie: So she was, she was definitely a different experience. She also, I think that it was a little harder for me to bond with her at first because she was so boisterous and demanding and loud and... just sort of a...

Interviewer: And not especially interested in you.

Marie: Right, and he was very cuddly and sweet and just wanted to be held. She didn't want to be held, she wanted to be, you know, jumping around and (laughs) you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Marie: So it's only in the last few months that she's really wanted to be held and cuddled. And now we've got this nice relationship going, but um, it was really, it was really quite different. And I think that having two children is just going through a whole different level of chaos and...work and confusion. (everyone laughs)

Interviewer: That's true.

Marie: You have two right?

Interviewer: I have...yes, two sons.

Marie: Uh huh.

Interviewer: But very different personalities. Very different personalities. You know, one very intense as a child and I ...at the time we didn't even know about things like inherited temperament. I mean, agencies would, like, take them home to your house and

all you do is provide them with a warm loving, whatever home and everything just, you know, turns out great. (laughs) Nobody said anything about inherited temperaments.

Marie: Yeah.

Interviewer: So ah, that was probably one of the biggest um, sorts of learning experiences, ah, that we had. There were lots of things that we weren't going to be able to influence. And we thought that we were going to be able to influence everything that was the sort of story that we had been told. Well, so have you had experiences that surprised you? Or that you were unprepared for? Or that you think that you handled especially well?

Marie: I would say...with Michael the things that I wasn't prepared for were the severity of his condition when he came and in fact, when I saw him he didn't seem that bad and then when I showed him to a succession of people, like pediatricians and early intervention specialists, they would all kind of, you know,

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Marie: (Laughing) Oh wow.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: So that made me... more um, concerned. With Tina I think it's really been just a personality thing that has been a surprise to me and the fact that a little baby girl can push so many buttons.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Yes.

Marie: And I'm wondering what's she going to be like when she is fifteen. (Laughs) You know, maybe she'll be really different. Because I've noticed that this summer has been much easier than last summer was, when she was, you know, six to ten months old she was really difficult. And now, this summer having learned to crawl and walk and talk a little bit, and sort of be in control of herself and be able to do things, she's much easier to get along with.

Interviewer: So that was exactly my next question. What do you imagine it will be like with older adopted children, teenagers and young adults for example.

Marie: My gut feeling is that Michael, you know, he's extremely attached to us and always has been. And it could be because of his, you know, this situation he was in two orphanages being over there for fifteen months, you know, having two hundred kids there, whatever. Or it could be just his personality. I sorta feel like he's going to be the one who's, you know, is really attached to us. And Tina, I can envision her, um, you know, testing us. A lot. And hopefully, we'll have...developed a strong enough relationship that we'll be able to deal with it. But you never know and I always look at my family. I grew up with four, there was four of us in my family and um, the second child, I was the oldest, the second child in the family...tested my parents.

Interviewer: First girl?

Marie: I was the first girl. Yeah. And my sister tested my parents pretty severely. And is now at the age of, you know, forty-two, finally, on a very good track. But she gave my mother about twenty years of a really hard time. (Laughs) So, you know, and they

were biologically connected. The fact that Tina and I aren't biologically connected I hope won't affect the way I deal with her or the way I feel about her.

Charlie: I expect it would be the same as other kids. Oh, I think ah, our social worker...did um, bring up various issues about ah, teenagers and adoption and that and sort of to warn us and help us think about it and um,...right now I'm not too concerned about it. I think their personalities are as Marie described it, but I don't think it's going to be any problem above and beyond the normal problems, whatever they are...

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: raising teenagers.

Marie: Well, I'm not sure about that.

Charlie: I tend not to think about these things ahead of time.

Interviewer: (Laughs.)

Charlie: Like your question about was I surprised about what it was like raising them, well, I didn't really have lots of preconceptions.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: Or expectations. And a lot of the reason I did it was because Marie wanted to, so I didn't have goals in mind or things that I wanted, you know, that wasn't why I was

doing it, so I didn't really have expectations. I had some concerns. But I'm not sure how different they are from concerns about having kids in general.

Interviewer: Concerns like?

Charlie: Oh, just that...it's difficult raising kids. It takes a lot of time. Which is all true.

Interviewer: Oh sure.

Charlie: You know, I'm not surprised. (Everyone laughs.)

Interviewer: Right.

Marie: I think that's been um, kind of an eye opener to both of us. The fact that it takes so much time and energy to deal with children. It's more than I had expected. Um, and I'm home full time right now. I did work a little, part time, over the last few years, but being home full-time with pre-schoolers is really a hard job and, um, I wouldn't not have done it. I wouldn't, I wouldn't, you know, if I had it to do over again I would still do it the same way, but I have a lot, a lot more respect for my Mother now.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And for other mothers that um, for other parents who stay home with children. I think it's...

Charlie: That's not an adoption issue.

Marie: Right, that's not an adoption issue.

Interviewer: Right.

Marie: And as far as, you know, what they are going to be like when they grow up, I think, (pause) I can communicate with Michael...really well right now and I think, you know, I've tried to um, make adoption a very normal thing. Like, you know, we talk about it a lot. And we have friends, a lot of friends who have adopted children and um, (pause) in fact our next door neighbor has two adopted African-American daughters. So, I'm hoping that, and growing up in this neighbor...in this area, I think with so many people from other countries, as well as adopted people, I'm hoping that it seems like a pretty normal thing to have a mother who looks different from you. Um, we have friends who are interracially married so we often see a mother driving the children to school who don't look anything like her, but they're biologically related. You know, so, that was one of the reasons why we wanted to move here, aside from the fact that Charlie had a job here. We could have probably have chosen to stay [where we were] for a little bit longer, but we thought this would be a really good place to raise internationally adopted children.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: So, (pause) you know, I think, I think for Michael it may not be too difficult. He hasn't shown any...um, problems yet with being a different color. I mean, he talks about his skin color a lot, he talks about his hair color. And, but he sees role models on television now, which we didn't see when we were kids...

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: who look like him. So I think that is going to help him. I have no idea what Tina's going to be like and how she'll respond to that whole thing.

Interviewer: So you do, then, have some friends who are adoptive parents and that you socialize with and that the kids...

Marie: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: see in the neighborhood and meet in school and that kind of thing?

Charlie: In fact, friends who have adopted Indian kids. Two families.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Well, we know many families who adopted Indian kids, but two that we see fairly frequently. One little girl who was with Tina in the orphanage, and so we consider her and Tina to be kind of um, like siblings or cousins or something.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Um. And then this other family in [town] who has three adopted Indian children so...

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: you know, that gives a sense of normalcy to it as well.

Interviewer: Oh sure.

Marie: And...

Interviewer: So how do you think other people view your family? Do they think of it as being the same or different from other families?

Charlie: I can imagine people think of it as different. Not knowing. Not having experienced it.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Well, I think they probably do because I know I felt that way when I used to see, um, people with adopted children who didn't look anything like them.

Charlie: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: I used to think, oh, you know, that must be really different. I remember seeing, when we were in Austria once, seeing a family of two parents who looked really like German, very tall, big, heavy, blonde hair and these two little, thin, dark Indian kids and I thought, oh, that's what Charlie and I are going to look like. (laughing)

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And it looked a little, you know, a little strange to me but um, so I imagine other people have that.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Until they get to know us then they probably don't think about it.

Interviewer: What I'm always doing is looking and saying, "I'll bet that is an adoptive family." (laughs)

Marie: Yeah, uh huh.

Interviewer: I did that the other day. I looked at this couple somewhere [while we were on vacation] and they had this small Chinese little girl and I said I bet they adopted that baby from China. (Everyone laughing) It's always girls.

Charlie: Probably one surprise I had was that when I'd seen people like that in the past and thought of them...seem different and then when it happened to me, it didn't seem different at all. You just totally forget about it.

Marie: Yeah, you do forget about it.

Charlie: And uh, sometimes you're out like...in public and you see somebody who is staring at your family. Most often kids are doing that.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Yeah, people will come up to you and say, "Where are they from?"

Charlie: It reminds you...

Marie: One thing I think (pause) might help them is that looking so different from us, it's totally obvious from the beginning that they are adopted so there's no point in trying to avoid it so it becomes more of a topic of conversation earlier on. Maybe. And maybe that will help them to...deal with it a little more. I hope. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: I thought that it was important that we had at least one other child in the same situation, not just one.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: So that [...] Michael wouldn't be alone with this.

Interviewer: Yes, right.

Charlie: That he would have someone in the family who was very similar to him in terms of, you know, adoption, skin color.

Interviewer: Uh huh. I think you're right.

Charlie: It helps a lot.

Interviewer: I think you're right. Yes indeed.

Charlie: That was a reason to have two.

Interviewer: That they would be, that they can share this experience. They are both in the same boat and um, they share the same family and somehow have that, all of that, in common.

Marie: Yeah. I think you're right.

Charlie: So they can talk amongst themselves about it later, so we don't have to do all of the explaining to them about things.

Interviewer: Um huh, Well what do you, are you satisfied with the way current adoption laws affect your family? Or do you think that they should be changed, could be changed somehow?

Marie: (Long pause) I think I'm satisfied with the ah, process of our adoptions um. What, what I found particularly difficult to deal with was um, the INS which really doesn't have much to do with adoption law, but getting all the paperwork to the Immigration Naturalization. . .

Interviewer: I've heard other people say that.

Marie: was really off-putting and they make absolutely no attempt to make this a welcoming, happy situation at all.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Marie: And just, you know, treat it like, if you can pass all these hurdles then, you know, you may do, we may permit you to do this. Um, but there's no joy in it at all. And so that, you know, kind of leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

Interviewer: Why do you think they make it so difficult?

Marie: Probably because they don't want people to do it really. They wanna, they'd like to discourage people from doing this, but if you insist, okay, we'll let you but you've gotta jump over all...

Charlie: But their focus is adults who are becoming citizens.

Interviewer: Right.

Charlie: And they're not going to do anything special for little kids.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Um, this again also doesn't have anything to do with the law but has to do with social workers attitudes. I think that they're mistaken in insisting that people forget about infertility treatment while they are pursuing adoption. Um, because, I mean we didn't forget about it. I was doing an in vitro fertilization process during the time that we were getting Michael's assignment and...

Charlie: We were supposed to, they wanted us to.

Marie: They wanted us to forget about it and...we didn't, and um, [one agency] would have really pushed it. Would have really, you know, harangued us about it.

Interviewer: They insisted that you not be pursuing infertility treatment.

Marie: They insisted um, I'm sure you could...do it but if, you know, they made you feel like a criminal for doing it. [Our agency's] attitude was, well, you know, we prefer that you don't, but...(laughs) we're not going to ask too many questions.

Interviewer: Why do they care about it? What does...what is so...

Marie: They feel that if you still want to have a biological child then you don't really want to...adopt a child. And I don't really think that is true at all. I think um, you, ah, we wanted a child and whether the child came as an adopted child or biological child, we would be...very happy to have a child.

Charlie: Uh huh.

Marie: And um, you know, I could see...them saying, after you receive an assignment of a child, stop infertility treatment for awhile. But [that former agency] goes as far as to say we want you to take uh, birth control pills, we want you to use birth control methods during your adoption process. And I think that is invasion of privacy for one thing and you know, a real misunderstanding of how people feel about adoption.

Charlie: I can imagine for an older couple with just a few child bearing years left um, who started late, but they would want, and who wanted a large family, would want to proceed with both and if they both worked out, great, I could imagine...

Interviewer: Well, I think that...

Charlie: There are a lot of good reasons.

Interviewer: It is interesting to hear complaints about social workers. That's been one of the interesting things that I've noticed about these interviews is the great numbers of complaints I hear about social workers. And how, and how agencies...treat, um, prospective adoptive parents.

Charlie: Part of our adoption process, and Marie took the lead, I was always getting my information from her, a part of it was to find out about the various social work agencies and find out about people's experiences and pick one and we found out about agencies

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: and the way they treated you. We made our choice accordingly so...we happen not, to not have many complaints, we don't have any complaints at all, but that's because we, you know, purposely chose a certain agency.

Interviewer: You shopped.

Marie: Yeah, and we happened to be very lucky to find a great social worker at that agency. But I think that all the social workers there are...really good. You know, really caring people who treat families individually. And that's really important I think...because not everybody's the same.

Interviewer: So, so how do you feel or what do you think about adoptees and birth parents searching for and finding each other and about unsealing records and that kind of thing?

Charlie: Well, I think it's very controversial. I think I would have a hard time with that process. That's one of the advantages with foreign adoption.

Interviewer: You're the first person who's been real up front about that too. And I think you're right.

Charlie: The situation we're in now that will never be an issue.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: You know, we're never gonna have to face that. So, I haven't really thought about it.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Charlie: So, I'm not sure what I would think.

Interviewer: I think though that...

Charlie: I'm glad I don't have to.

Interviewer: I think that a lot of people feel that way about um, they say that, they don't think it's gonna be an issue because they all know what the situation is back in Russia or Korea or (indecipherable).

Charlie: That wasn't behind our choice of foreign adoption.

Marie: No, in fact I think that if I had, if I had a child from this country and that child wanted to find his or her adoptive parents, or birth parents, I would um, be supportive and try to help them. And in fact, um...there was a woman visiting from the orphanage, [in India] not this summer but last summer. And I asked her if there was any information about the birth mothers of these children. Because I thought well, I might as well ask the question now because if they decide they want to search in eighteen years, you know, maybe a lot of information will have disappeared. So, she said that um, in their case (pause) a lot of the girls who come there and give birth are...giving false names. They do give a name and an address but they give often false names and false addresses. In fact, almost always they give false names and false addresses. So...

Interviewer: Why?

Marie: Because they're so um, shame...shameful.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Marie: Filled with shame about having a child out of wedlock or putting a child up for adoption or whatever. So. . .

Interviewer: So mostly then these are young women who, who are unmarried?

Marie: That's the impression I get and they come from all around the Calcutta area, not just from the city.

Interviewer: Uh huh. Oh, so this is the Calcutta area?

Marie: Yeah. And they come into the city to give birth and then they go back to their...families and villages. And you know, maybe nobody ever noticed that they had a child. So they would be really devastated by a child coming to search for them and they have no interest in searching for the child.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: Um, so, you know, that seems to be the situation in India. And I think in some ways...I mean it certainly gives a relief to the parents because you think well it's something you never have to deal with. But it may also be slightly a relief to the children. Even though it's kind of a sad thing that you won't ever be able to make that connection.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: You don't have the, they may not have the...

Charlie: They don't have to make the choice.

Marie: You don't have to make the choice. Right. You don't have to decide whether that's the right thing for you or not. And I also think that, um, because they are from another ethnic group and culture that maybe they can get whatever...uh, feeling of

belonging, background, you know, kind of a family feeling from learning about the culture.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And learning the language. And learning, like in Tina's case, learning Indian games. So I'm hoping that...that the cultural aspects will be, you know, somewhat of a substitute for not being able to find their biological families.

Interviewer: So basically children in orphanages in India, then, are...orphans in the sense that they have been left there by...

Marie: Usually they're born in what they call a nursing home, which is a place where these woman come to give birth and then right from the nursing home the orphanage comes and takes the children and, you know, takes them to the orphanage.

Interviewer: Ah, I was just curious because I talked to a couple recently who'd adopted from Russia and they said while though the children in orphanages there aren't necessarily orphans, they may have been taken away from the family also for reasons of abuse and neglect.

Marie: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Um, frequently because um, there may be alcohol problems in the family and the state is...

Charlie: Sure.

Interviewer: does not fool around with that. They take children out immediately and they're never returned.

Marie: Mm.

Interviewer: Um.

Marie: That's not the impression I have of India. Um, (pause) it almost seems like, I mean they have all they can do to deal with the children who don't have parents at all.

Interviewer: Um huh.

Marie: So, what I understand about this orphanage in particular is that children come there as newborns. And it's rare that a child comes there...at an older age. Although they do...once in awhile. But there are older children living there but they're usually...children who were...came there at birth but are unadoptable for various reasons, because their disabilities are so severe or whatever.

Interviewer: So, so it may be, then, that your children's biological mothers didn't have appropriate, um, physical care, during their pregnancy, maybe weren't eating well or getting enough milk or...whatever.

Marie: That would account for some of their delayed development.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's what I was, was fishing for. Well, how do you feel about open adoption where birth parents remain in contact...after placement? How do you think something like that would have affected your family if you were doing that?

Marie: I don't think it would have been right for us.

Charlie: I couldn't have handled that situation.

Marie: I think Charlie and I, um, are pretty private people and we...wouldn't really like to...take somebody, I mean that person probably becomes almost a member of your family and um, you know, some part of your extended family anyway. And...I think that would have been really hard for us to deal with, having somebody, all of a sudden, an adult become part of our family.

Charlie: We never would have done it.

Marie: Although we know, we know a family in [another city], in the [city] area, who has done that really successfully.

Interviewer: Oh really.

Marie: But I think that they are different people. [She] is extremely out going and effusive and loves to talk and loves to be a mother to everybody and..um, and I think she...does well in that situation and keeps in contact...with the birth mothers of her two children. And, you know, that works out fine for her. So, my feeling is...it wouldn't have worked for us but I can understand how it works for other people.

Interviewer: Uh huh. Well so if, if you think about sort of the kinds of range of things that we've talked about um, just today what sense do you make of it? What stands out in your mind about it or how would you summarize it?

Marie: I think it's been really great. It's given us the opportunity to become parents. (Speaking to Tina about her diaper: Yeah, and you're so stinky!)

Charlie: One thing I'd like to see changed in the laws, I think it would be nice if they were tax benefits. With adoption expenses being as high as they are, a tax cut...

Interviewer: Uh huh. I've heard other people say this.

Charlie: Because I do feel, and I think in general people who adopt, we raise our kids very well and I think it's likely...that our kids will...contribute to our society. And um, it's my understanding that generally speaking, kids that are raised well will benefit society, you know, be productive members. So it would be nice if that was recognized.

Marie: Well it is recognized on a state level.

Interviewer: Oh really.

Marie: You get a tax benefit for adoption...

Charlie: That's right.

Marie: expenses from the state.

Interviewer: Huh.

Marie: But not from the federal government. And our expenses, even though, I should tell you, even though we adopted from India, which is one of the...probably less

expensive international programs, it was...between, well it was a little bit over ten thousand for Michael and about twelve thousand for Tina. Which is a big chunk...

Interviewer: A lot of money.

Marie: for a middle class family to come up with. So any help that the government could give...would be really beneficial.

Interviewer: Sure.

Charlie: It has been talked about for quite awhile.

Marie: Yeah.

Charlie: But it has been proposed. It would be too late for us, but in any case it's a good idea.

Interviewer: Oh, I think you're right, I think you're right. So if you could paint a picture, or sing a song or tell a story, um, about adoption what would it be?

Marie: (laughs) Hmm.

Charlie: I would generally say it's very little different from having biological kids...I believe.

Marie: On a day to day basis it's not different at all.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: It's exactly the same.

Charlie: It's exactly the same. Yeah.

Interviewer: So you're..is your story about adoption now different than it used to be, do you think?

Marie: Yeah. Yes, I used to worry about it being very different and...

Charlie: Before we adopted.

Marie: scary and strange. And I read a ton, I read so much about adoption. I used to go to ODS conferences and...

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: I was just at the library all the time reading about teenagers and how they felt about it and birth mothers and how they felt about it and I just tried to get a sense of how the world at large and the adoption community in particular felt about adoption. And...I think I was, that's because I was so nervous about it.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: You know, not thinking it would feel...normal. And it does feel completely normal.

Charlie: I was very nervous about it too.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And I think that our extended families have also, you know, responded in a very normal, loving way and treat our children as if they were our biological offspring.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: So, um, so far I'd say that for us it's been really great.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: A great experience. In fact, sometimes I think that I might be harder on a child who was biologically mine because I would see things of myself that I didn't like in that child. (Laughs) And probably come down harder on him or her.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And these children I don't have that feeling at all. I feel like everything that they came with is...not my fault and I don't have myself to praise or blame about it. So I can accept them for, you know, more like who they are, rather than as if it's a reflection of me.

Interviewer: Oh, isn't that nice. That's very nice. Uh huh. I think that, I think that that's an important insight. I really do. I really do. Well if you, so, considering all the things that we've talked about, about the law for example and adoption reform would you be,

have any willingness to be involved in adoption reform? Or would anything stop you from being involved in adoption reform movement?

Marie: The only thing that would stop me would be the fact that we haven't finalized Tina's adoption yet, and so I would want to get through with that and through with a...naturalization process for her before I got involved in anything.

Interviewer: So now, let me just clarify if I understand what the process was. Is what you're waiting for now an adoption? Citizenship? Or both?

Marie: Both.

Charlie: Both.

Marie: Both. We are waiting for a court date to finalize Tina's adoption.

Interviewer: Okay.

Marie: We applied for that, we started applying for it in February and for some reason it's just taking forever. We filed the papers in June and then I called a couple of weeks ago to find out what the story was and it's been, ah, it's just taking a long time.
Interviewer: Because I thought in [this state] it took six months.

Marie: You can apply to finalize it after six months but um...it usually doesn't happen for longer than that.

Interviewer: Oh.

Marie: And in our case, you know, it seems to be just dragging on. It could be the, we're not sure if it's the adoption agency or the court...or whom...is dragging their feet. But, so I'd want to finish with that and also get...the citizenship straightened out before I got involved politically.

Charlie: Which can't happen until after

Marie: After you finalize it.

Charlie: You finalize...then you can do the citizenship.

Interviewer: But the couple from Russia said, now, he went to Russia and picked up the child. Now, apparently that child was adopted by them in Russia.

Marie: But then I think they have to adopt them again in [this state].

Interviewer: I think so. And what, there's this naturalization thing that has to happen and she has to become a citizen.

Marie: And in fact, the law has changed to the extent that, (pause) this is the way I understand it, adopted foreign children are considered citizens, but they don't have any proof of citizenship until you go to the, um, INS and get a certificate of citizenship which is what we got for Michael. It's a little bit different than the naturalization process. It's an acknowledgement that they are in fact citizens rather than...a change of citizenship. At least that's what I have read.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: But we still have to do that for Tina.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Marie: And that takes forever. I remember just assembling, you know, reams of papers for that. We applied in February and we were...finally called for an appointment at the end of October.

Interviewer: Wow.

Marie: It was sort of like, you know, appear at this time at this place, at this, on this date.

Interviewer: Huh.

Marie: And nothing about if you can't come call this number you know. This is it lady, if you're not here, forget it. (everyone laughing)

Interviewer: Oh my God.

Marie: So um, but I would be, I would be willing to, (pause) you know, maybe do something about getting tax benefits for adoptive families or trying to work through the INS to make the process a little bit easier for people adopting overseas.

Interviewer: Um hum.

Marie: Um, and those are really the two things that we're probably concerned about.

Interviewer: Um huh.

Marie: The social worker issue, you know, it's really a question of shop around until you find someone you're compatible with.

Interviewer: Um huh.

Marie: And then as far as the laws in [the state] go um, we had found, when we were first trying to adopt we looked into adopting from another state. My Mother has a friend who's a lawyer in [another city] and she knew some young girl who might have been interested in...placing children with our family, but the interstate compact...which is something that had certain requirements, paperwork requirements, transferring a child from one state to another...

Interviewer: Um huh.

Marie: was pretty complicated. And so that kind of turned the lawyer off and I must say it turned us off too.

Interviewer: Um.

Marie: So that is...something that we never had to deal with, but we chose a situation where we didn't have to deal with it.

Interviewer: Um huh. Um huh.

Marie: So.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh. Well, (laughs) it is a production.

Marie: It is. How did you ah, how did you adopt your children?

Interviewer: Well, at the time, our sons are twenty-five and twenty-two. And it was (snaps fingers) like that.

Marie: Yeah?

Interviewer: Walk into the agency, um, have the meetings and we had, our first son was three weeks old when he came into our home. And um it was nine months after we started the process.

Marie: Really?

Interviewer: And the second...child was also three weeks old. So they were both very young but, you know, [the first] was born in 1970 and um, in this area, we worked with [an agency] in [a local city] um, in 1970 that agency placed twice as many babies as it had ever placed previously. And never placed that many again.

Marie: Yeah.

Interviewer: So it was really very fast and young women were still, nobody...they weren't keeping babies and they..and abortion wasn't available. Three years later things had changed radically. Um...

Marie: Was it Roe vs Wade?

Interviewer: Yes, I think so. And because of abortion, because young women were keeping babies. Um and we, I in fact, didn't think that we would be able to get a second child. I thought it was, the market was so tight at that point, that I figured that they were going to say, "One is enough and you won't be able to have any more children", but that's why I was interested in talking about the malnutrition, one of the things we checked off was that we would be willing to do we would be willing to take a red head. And this baby had red hair. (Everyone laughs.) I always thought that's probably the reason they called, "Oh, here's someone who's willing to take a red head, well!"

Marie: That's funny, boy.

Interviewer: Of course the red hair disappeared.

Marie: That certainly wasn't on our list. Things like club feet, and...

Interviewer: Oh yes.

Charlie: Oh yeah.

Marie: One eye, missing arm and you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Marie: Missing arm and you know.

Charlie: Yeah.

Interviewer: Right. Right, heart surgery. I remember, I remember a friend of mine who was an adoptive parent. At that point saying to me, "You don't have to say that you'll...take those things, you don't have to agree to that."

Marie: You have to be honest.

Interviewer: "If what you want is a healthy baby then you need to say that." And be up front.

Marie: Because otherwise you're not going to be able to deal with what you're presented.

Interviewer: Oh right. Yes it would be impossible.

APPENDIX F

PROFILE NARRATIVE FOR CHARLIE AND MARIE

Charlie and Marie are a Caucasian couple in their mid forties. They both come from a Roman Catholic background and both have graduate degrees. Marie had been employed outside the home, but since their youngest child's arrival she has been a full-time Mother. Charlie works in the computer field. Michael and Tina were adopted internationally and came home from India as babies, Michael at fifteen months and Tina at five months; they are now ages six years and 22 months, respectively. There is no history of adoption in Charlie's family; on Marie's side there is a relative adoption several generations back. The theme of their narrative is "A Positive Way to Form a Family."

Interviewer: Tell me the story of how you came to be adoptive parents.

Marie: Well, we went through a long period of infertility treatment, I had ruptured an appendix when I was a child and so that caused a lot of problems. And it became clear, probably five years into the fertility stuff, that it probably wasn't going to work and so we started exploring adoption. I went to some of the agencies to see if there was one that kind of fit our needs. I visited a few of them, among which is a really big organization that's kinda regimental in the way it deals with people, but they certainly have placed a lot of children and I visited [another] which is the group that we eventually worked with. And they are smaller and much more willing to work with people on an individual basis. I remember it was March of 1988 because I had an operation for...some abdominal scarring in October of '87 and we thought we'd give that a few months to see if that worked and it didn't. So we applied in March of '88.

Charlie: I think we had choices like Korea, India, various South American countries. I guess there were some administrative differences and cost differences. But in the end we had to find some other reason...to choose.

Marie: I think we decided not to go domestic adoption because it took a long time. Either...we would have to come up with a lot of money, we did anyway have to come up with a lot of money, but it was even more for a domestic adoption and...it seemed very...sorta precarious in the way it worked, whereas overseas adoptions it seemed like if you did all the paperwork and you had the right fee eventually you would get a child. Some of the American programs that I looked at, either they were involving things like advertising in the other states and taking a chance of birth mothers changing their minds or...things like birth mothers who didn't get health insurance and exposing ourselves to having to pay some kind of astronomical health bill and we just...knew we had a certain limited amount of funds and energy to do this and so I had heard very good things about this...program in India. In fact, I talked to...a woman who has adopted four Indian children and she told me very good things about the program and it just seemed like the right...thing.

Charlie: India is a very bureaucratic country. So it doesn't move very quickly at all. Once they decide to do it a certain way...it takes a while to work that out.

Marie: From the time we started the application process until we actually got Michael, it was two and a half years. [He was fifteen months when he came home] And with Tina it was shorter. That had to do with...a number of things...the processing was going more smoothly and also we had a home study done already and that just had to be updated and we were familiar with our social worker who is really a great, wonderful

person. She has twelve adopted children. And they are all older. She's been through it a lot and she's very realistic and has really been supportive and helpful.

When Michael came home it was just really wonderful. I remember just being really excited...cause it was so new; I am sure this is true of every first time parent. We were just thrilled, we watched his every move, we paid attention to him all the time. We spent tons of time with him which, now I consider, may not have been such a great thing because he's fairly dependent on us for entertainment. We got a lot of support from family members who came and visited. My Mother came to stay for a week.

Michael [was escorted to the U.S.] It took him, I think, five days to get here from India. They stopped in Bangkok and then he stopped in Seattle and then he spent a night in Minneapolis and then came [here]. And he was in pretty bad condition when he arrived. He was very thin, very weak, he had a lot of developmental delays. The referral that we had gotten on him, which we received in...May I guess, was fairly scary. It said moderate to severe malnutrition. It listed how big he was and how much he weighed and the fact that he had a problem with wheezing and developmental delays and all this stuff.

Charlie: When we were filling out forms...what kind of problems a child might have that we could deal with, in general we checked off no, no for the severe problems. And when we saw malnutrition I thought it just meant hadn't been eating well. You know, they hadn't had a good source of food. So we said, well that's fine. And then when we finally got our referral, that's when we found out what it meant was...he had been getting enough food, but he wasn't growing as fast as he should. And something else was probably going on and that's what scared us. Because the possibilities of what he might have had... were pretty strange.

Marie: Yeah, they were pretty scary. I showed this information to a couple of...American pediatricians and they said, "Stay away from this situation."

Charlie: We had a choice at this point of what to do.

Marie: But we had waited so long and we got a picture.

Charlie: We talked to other people too.

Marie: So then I called the mother of the four children from this [same] orphanage and she said, "Well, you know, he is smaller than normal for an Indian child but...maybe there is something there that we don't know about and we should find out about it." So she and another adoptive mother helped me to draft a letter that...elicited more information about him. It took a long time, it took about...five or six weeks to get the information from India, but we finally got a letter explaining and he was really sick. He had a collapsed lung and was exposed to TB.

Charlie: So that was in the letter that we found that out? I had forgotten the sequence of events.

Marie: I mean it sounds like bad news, but it was sort of good cause then we said to ourselves, oh that's why he's so small, that's why he's so weak. So we said yes, but that was in like July, so there was August, September and finally he came October.

Charlie: They had taken all the children who they wanted to send to their assignments and moved them from the orphanage that didn't have a license to this other one, as a way of getting them placed. Move them somewhere else.

Marie: When he finally came he was very happy and bright-eyed and you could tell he was okay mentally. But he just had a long way to go physically. We had him assessed by an early intervention team and he had physical therapy and various types of therapy until just now; we had someone come to the house once a week to help him learn how to do things like, we had to teach him how to crawl, teach him how to get up and sit down. You know, lots of things that are really simple for other children.

Charlie: Hold his bottle. They told us right away he should be holding his own bottle. Things like that.

Marie: But he couldn't bend over. If he was standing here and there was a toy on the floor, he couldn't...figure out how to get down and get the toy. So we had to work on that a lot. And now he is going into kindergarten. And you know, he's gotten such great help from so many people he's ready and he can do just about everything that any other six year old can.

Charlie: He also had a problem with his leg when he was younger. Where his feet were turned out. It was because he started walking so late. And his toes weren't pointing forward the way they should. He had to wear this...device at night time. To get his feet pointed forward. That lasted...awhile.

Marie: Nine months I think he had to wear that [brace.] And then he had to take TB medicine for six months after he arrived. So I'd say his arrival was very exciting and adventurous and just really out of the ordinary. I felt like we were constantly breaking new ground. Talking to pediatric orthopedists and early intervention people and all of these people that I'd never even heard of before.

When Tina came it was very different. She was really robust. And she was as chubby as can be. And she was really feisty and loud and cute and seeming to be very strong and sure of herself from the very beginning. I remember standing her up on my lap and having her open her mouth and just shriek in delight at being stood up. Just the loudest shriek I've ever heard from a baby. She's loud, opinionated, active, just quite different from our first experience. She doesn't like to sit still very much. And she also has some developmental delays. She just learned how to walk about a month ago, which is pretty late. But she's had therapy for fine motor skills as well as gross motor skills. And she had a real problem with eating for awhile. She didn't want to pick things up and she just didn't want to be fed. All she would do is drink a bottle for quite a long time. Now she's more or less reconciled to...eating food from a tray, but she was definitely a different experience. I think that it was a little harder for me to bond with her at first because she was so boisterous and demanding and loud and...[Michael] was very cuddly and sweet and just wanted to be held. I think that having two children is just going through a whole different level of chaos and...work and confusion. I would say...with Michael the things that I wasn't prepared for were the severity of his condition when he came. With Tina I think it's really been just a personality thing that has been a surprise to me and the fact that a little baby girl can push so many buttons. And I'm wondering what's she going to be like when she is fifteen. My gut feeling is that Michael is extremely attached to us and always has been. I sorta feel like he's going to be the one who's really attached to us. And Tina, I can envision her testing us. A lot. And hopefully, we'll have...developed a strong enough relationship that we'll be able to deal with it.

Charlie: I expect it would be the same as other kids. Oh, I think our social worker...did bring up various issues about teenagers and adoption sort of to warn us and help us think about it and...right now I'm not too concerned about it. I think their personalities

are as Marie described, but I don't think it's going to be any problem above and beyond the normal problems, whatever they are...raising teenagers.

Marie: Well, I'm not sure about that.

Charlie: I tend not to think about these things ahead of time.
I didn't really have lots of preconceptions. Or expectations. And a lot of the reason I [adopted] was because Marie wanted to, so I didn't have goals in mind or things that I wanted, that wasn't why I was doing it, so I didn't really have expectations. I had some concerns. But I'm not sure how different they are from concerns about having kids in general. Oh, just that...it's difficult raising kids. It takes a lot of time. Which is all true. I'm not surprised.

Marie: I think I can communicate with Michael...really well right now and I've tried to make adoption a very normal thing. Like we talk about it a lot. And we have friends, a lot of friends who have adopted children, in fact our neighbor has two adopted African-American daughters. So I'm hoping that it seems like a pretty normal thing to have a mother who looks different from you. We have friends who are interracially married, so we often see a mother driving children to school who don't look anything like her, but they're biologically related. I think for Michael it may not be too difficult. I mean, he talks about his skin color a lot, he talks about his hair color. And he sees role models on television now, which we didn't see when we were kids...who look like him. So I think that is going to help him. I have no idea what Tina's going to be like and how she'll respond to that whole thing.

Charlie: We have friends who have adopted Indian kids. Two families. I can imagine people think of it as different. Not knowing. Not having experienced it.

Marie: I remember when we were in Austria once, seeing a family of two parents who looked really German, very tall, big, heavy, blonde hair and these two little, thin, dark Indian kids and I thought, oh that's what Charlie and I are going to look like.
And it looked a little strange to me, so I imagine other people have that. Until they get to know us, then they probably don't think about it.

Charlie: Probably one surprise I had was that when I'd seen people like that in the past and thought of them...as different and then when it happened to me, it didn't seem different at all. You just totally forget about it. And sometimes you're out...in public and you see somebody who is staring at your family. Most often kids are doing that.

Marie: One thing I think might help them is that looking so different from us, it's totally obvious from the beginning that they are adopted, so there's no point in trying to avoid it, so it becomes more of a topic of conversation earlier on. Maybe. And maybe that will help them to...deal with it a little more. I hope.

Charlie: I thought that it was important that we had at least one other child in the same situation, not just one. So that Michael wouldn't be alone with this. That he would have someone in the family who was very similar to him in terms of adoption, skin color. It helps a lot. That was a reason to have two.
So they can talk amongst themselves about it later, so we don't have to do all of the explaining to them about things.

Marie: I think I'm satisfied with the process of our adoptions. What I found particularly difficult to deal with was the INS which was really off-putting and they make absolutely no attempt to make this a welcoming, happy situation at all.

Charlie: But their focus is adults who are becoming citizens. And they're not going to do anything special for little kids.

Marie: This also doesn't have anything to do with the law, but has to do with social workers attitudes. I think that they're mistaken in insisting that people forget about infertility treatment while they are pursuing adoption. I mean we didn't forget about it. I was doing an in vitro fertilization process during the time that we were getting Michael's assignment.

Charlie: We were supposed to [forget about it], they wanted us to.

Marie: They wanted us to forget about it and...we didn't, they made you feel like a criminal for doing it. They feel that if you still want to have a biological child then you don't really want to...adopt a child. And I don't really think that is true at all. I think we wanted a child and whether the child came as an adopted child or biological child, we would be...very happy to have a child. I could see...them saying, after you receive an assignment of a child, stop infertility treatment for awhile. But [some agencies] go as far as to say we want you to take birth control pills, we want you to use birth control methods during your adoption process. And I think that is invasion of privacy and a real misunderstanding of how people feel about adoption.

Charlie: I can imagine an older couple with just a few child bearing years left, who wanted a large family, would want to proceed with both and if they both worked out, great. Part of our adoption process, and Marie took the lead, I was always getting my information from her, was to find out about the various social work agencies and find out about people's experiences and pick one and we found out about agencies and the way they treated you. We made our choice accordingly so...we happen not to have

many complaints, we don't have any complaints at all, but that's because we purposely chose a certain agency.

Marie: And we happened to be very lucky to find a great social worker at that agency. But I think that all the social workers there are...really good, really caring people who treat families individually. And that's really important I think...because not everybody's the same.

Charlie: I think adoptees and birth parents searching is very controversial. I think I would have a hard time with that process. That's one of the advantages with foreign adoption. The situation we're in now, that will never be an issue. We're never gonna have to face that. So I haven't really thought about it. I'm not sure what I would think. I'm glad I don't have to.

Marie: If I had a child from this country and that child wanted to find his or her birth parents, I would be supportive and try to help them. And in fact...there was a woman visiting from the orphanage [in India] last summer. And I asked her if there was any information about the birth mothers of these children. Because I thought, well I might as well ask the question now because if they decide they want to search in eighteen years maybe a lot of information will have disappeared. So she said that a lot of the girls who come [to the orphanage] and give birth are...giving false names. They do give a name and an address, but they give often false names and false addresses. In fact, almost always they give false names and false addresses. Because they're so filled with shame about having a child out of wedlock or putting a child up for adoption. They come from all around the Calcutta area, into the city to give birth, and then they go back to their...families and villages. And you know, maybe nobody ever noticed that they had a child. So they would be really devastated by a child coming to search

for them and they have no interest in searching for the child. And I think in some ways...it certainly gives a relief to the parents because it's something you never have to deal with. But it may also be slightly a relief to the children. Even though it's kind of a sad thing that you won't ever be able to make that connection.

Charlie: They don't have to make the choice.

Marie: And I also think that because they are from another ethnic group and culture that maybe they can get whatever...feeling of belonging, background, you know, kind of a family feeling from learning about the culture. And learning the language. And learning Indian games. So I'm hoping that...the cultural aspects will be somewhat of a substitute for not being able to find their biological families.

Charlie: I couldn't have handled [open adoption either.]

Marie: I think Charlie and I are pretty private people and that person probably becomes almost a member of your family, your extended family anyway. And...I think that would have been really hard for us to deal with, having somebody all of a sudden become part of our family.

Charlie: We never would have done it.

Marie: Although we know a family who has done that really successfully. But I think that they are different people. [She] is extremely outgoing and effusive and loves to talk and loves to be a mother to everybody and she...does well in that situation and keeps in contact...with the birth mothers of her two children. So my feeling is...it wouldn't have worked for us, but I can understand how it works for other people.

Charlie: One thing I'd like to see changed is the laws; I think it would be nice if there were tax benefits. I think in general people who adopt, we raise our kids very well and I think it's likely...that our kids will...contribute to our society. And it's my understanding that generally speaking, kids that are raised well will benefit society, be productive members. So it would be nice if that was recognized.

Marie: And our expenses, even though we adopted from India, which is one of the...less expensive international programs, was...a little bit over ten thousand for Michael and about twelve thousand for Tina. Which is a big chunk...for a middle class family to come up with. So any help that the government could give...would be really beneficial.

Charlie: I would generally say [adoption's] very little different from having biological kids...I believe.

Marie: On a day to day basis it's not different at all. It's exactly the same.

Charlie: It's exactly the same. Yeah.

Marie: I used to worry about it being very different and...scary and strange. And I read a ton, I read so much about adoption. I used to go to ODS conferences and...I was just at the library all the time reading about teenagers and how they felt about it and birth mothers and how they felt about it and I just tried to get a sense of how the world at large and the adoption community in particular felt about adoption. And...I think that's because I was so nervous about it. Not thinking it would feel...normal. And it does feel completely normal.

Charlie: I was very nervous about it too.

Marie: And I think that our extended families have also, responded in a very normal, loving way and treat our children as if they were our biological offspring. In fact, sometimes I think that I might be harder on a child who was biologically mine because I would see things of myself that I didn't like in that child. And these children I don't have that feeling at all. I feel like everything that they came with is...not my fault and I don't have myself to praise or blame about it. So I can accept them for who they are, rather than as if it's a reflection of me.

We are waiting for a court date to finalize Tina's adoption. We applied for that in February and for some reason it's just taking forever. We filed the papers in June and then I called a couple of weeks ago to find out what the story was and it's just taking a long time. It could be the adoption agency or the court...is dragging their feet. This is the way I understand it: adopted foreign children are considered citizens, but they don't have any proof of citizenship until you go to the INS and get a certificate of citizenship which is what we got for Michael. It's a little bit different than the naturalization process. It's an acknowledgement that they are in fact citizens rather than...a change of citizenship. At least that's what I have read. But we still have to do that for Tina. And that takes forever. I remember just assembling reams of papers for that. We applied in February and we were...finally called for an appointment at the end of October. It was sort of like, appear at this time at this place on this date. And nothing about if you can't come call this number.

I would be willing to maybe do something about getting tax benefits for adoptive families or trying to work through the INS to make the process a little bit easier for people adopting overseas. Those are really the two things that we're probably concerned about. The social worker issue is really a question of shop around until you find someone you're compatible with.

And then as far as the laws in [the state] go, when we were first trying to adopt we looked into adopting from another state. My Mother has a friend who's a lawyer and she knew some young girl who might have been interested in...placing children with our family, but the interstate compact...which is something that had certain requirements, paperwork requirements, transferring a child from one state to another...was pretty complicated. And so that kind of turned the lawyer off and I must say it turned us off too. So that is...something that we never had to deal with, but we chose a situation where we didn't have to deal with it.

Checkback: Tina has grown and matured tremendously. Her adoption has been finalized and her citizenship papers now must be filed. Michael is in school and finds it quite tiring physically. He continues to prefer being entertained while Tina is more likely to play independently. Marie is most interested in the research for my dissertation and would like to have a copy.

APPENDIX G

CHECKBACK LETTER

Dear

It's been some time since our interview together regarding your experience in forming an adoptive family. After our meeting, the audiotape was transcribed in complete detail and then I reduced the transcription to a profile. This shortened version of the interview runs to about fifteen pages. I constructed it by eliminating all the awkward phrases and repetitions from the original as well as my own voice. This leaves only your words; however, the order of your spoken words has not been altered although some topics may have been dropped if they seemed unimportant to the flow of your narrative.

Now I would like to get together with you again for the checkback. This should not take very long, perhaps a half hour and will give you an opportunity to look over the profile and give me any feedback about the process that might have occurred to you since we last spoke. I will be in touch with you soon.

Sincerely yours,

APPENDIX H

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

Dear

My dissertation is nearly complete and now I hope you will give me your response to the discussion on the final two chapters. I have enclosed them for you to read. The follow up questions below and a self-addressed envelope are provided so that you can drop your comments in the mail easily. This is a busy time I know, but if you plan to respond, I must hear from you by _____. Thanks for your help.

1. What was most surprising to you about the text of chapters 4 and 5?

2. What did you find most useful?

3. How would you interpret differently than I did?

4. What has been important to you about your adoptive experience that you did not have a chance to talk about or that I did not ask you?

(Please use the back of this sheet or another page if you need more room)

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